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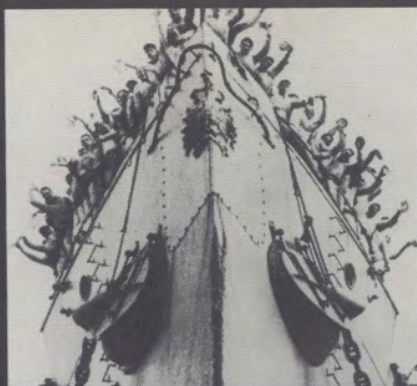
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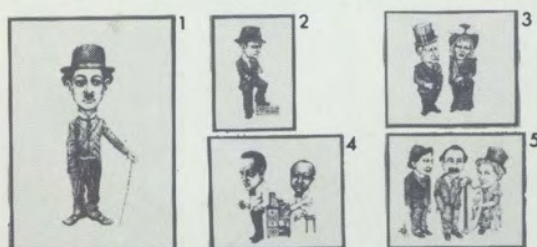
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
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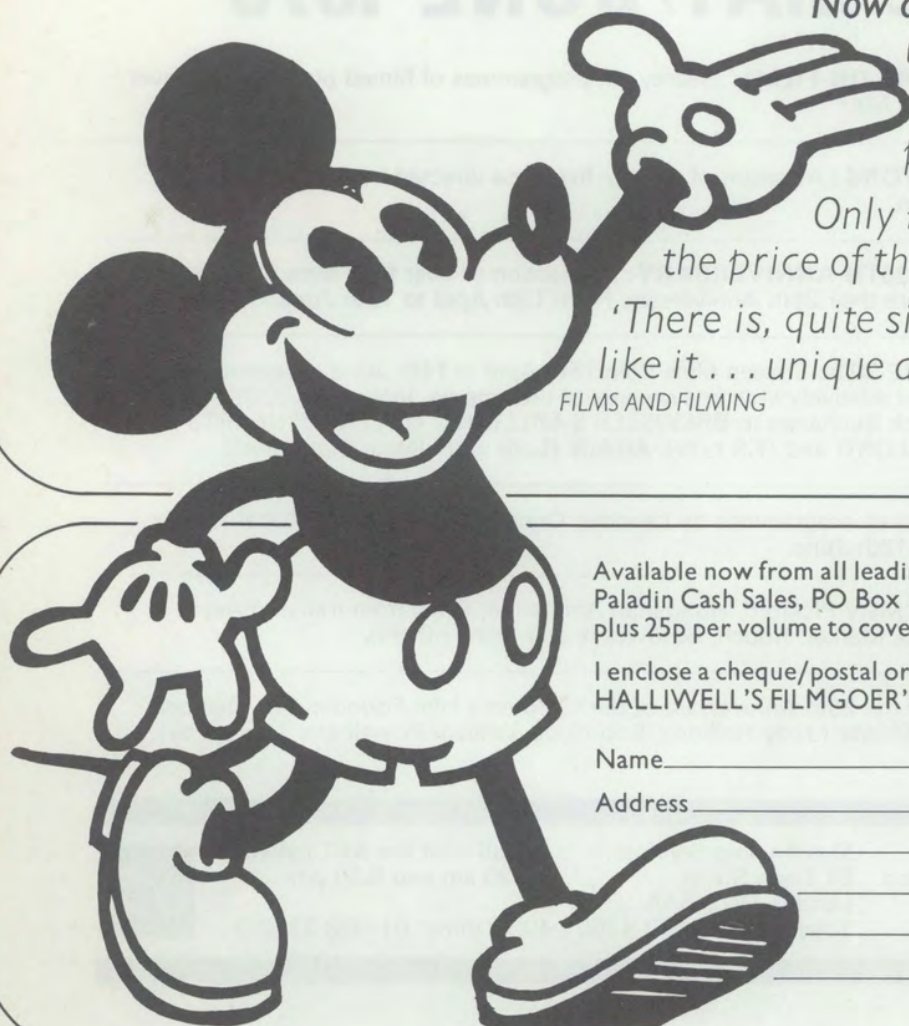
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SPRING 1976

Volume 45 No. 2

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Bert Hogenkamp

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In July/August 1975, the Dutch magazine *Skrien* devoted the greater part of an issue to a survey by Bert Hogenkamp of 'The Use of Film by the Workers' Movement in Great Britain, 1929-1939'. It was the result, he said, 'of two months research at the Institute for Social History in Amsterdam and a few working visits to London.' He intends to write similar surveys of other countries, and *Skrien* had previously published 'Ciné Liberté 1936-1939', dealing with the situation in France.

As far as we know, Hogenkamp's research into a neglected but not insignificant aspect of British film history has not been duplicated in this country. Although some of his findings may be questioned, we are glad to have the opportunity to publish in translation a somewhat condensed version of his survey.

The background, of course, was one of Depression and growing international tension. In 1933, there were almost three million unemployed in Britain, and these were the years of the hunger marches and other tactics to draw attention to their plight, many of them organised by the National Unemployed Workers' Movement under the leadership of the Communist Wal Hannington. The TUC largely dissociated itself from these actions. The Labour Party was at the start of the decade in considerable disarray, after Ramsay MacDonald's 'betrayal' and the débâcle of the 1931 election. By the 1935 General Election, however, Labour regained some of the lost ground, winning 154 seats (against 289 in 1929 and 52 in 1931); the Communist Willie Gallacher won East Fife, although the Communist Party of Great Britain only mustered some 8,000 members.

In the second half of the 1930s there came the trauma of the Spanish Civil War. The policy of the National Government, in general supported by the TUC leadership, was one of non-intervention. Large sections of the Left thought otherwise, and found such unexpected allies as the Conservative Duchess of Atholl, whose sympathy for Republican Spain earned her the nickname of the 'Red Duchess'. During the late 1930s there were various attempts to form a united front on the Left; but the divisions were too deep for a British Popular Front to emerge. In

September 1938 came the Munich Agreement; in March 1939 Madrid fell to Franco's army. Hitler annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia, marched into Poland, and on September 3, 1939 Britain declared war on Germany.

This was the background against which the British Left endeavoured, often not too effectively, to begin to come to terms with film as a potential and actual propaganda medium. The theme, as Hogenkamp says in introducing his study in *Skrien*, 'transcends the mere academic recording of a neglected piece of film history.' Although, 'this of course does not mean that the past strategies and methods of the workers' movement can simply be copied today; on the contrary, extreme caution is required.' The more significant activities in film developed, as he points out, 'in the second half of the 1930s, and were initiated by people . . . who wished to use their films to contribute to the formation of a British Popular Front.' (This was also the period in which the Left Book Club became influential.) Specialised film magazines of the period, Hogenkamp adds, 'contain little or no information about this subject.' Another question raised by the survey is 'that of the relative importance of the Film Society movement in Britain, and whether similar enterprises in other countries played an equally crucial role in stimulating the use of film by the workers' movement.'

Film Societies

In 1925 the Film Society had been founded, with the intention of showing films which were deemed to have little or no chance of reaching the screen in the commercial cinemas. The London County Council granted the Society exemption from censorship; and it was thanks to this exemption that the Society was able to screen Soviet films which would not otherwise have been imported or which had been turned down by the censor. By the autumn of 1928, a number of people were suggesting that such films should also be made accessible to the workers in Britain. Henry Dobb, film critic of the leftist Sunday paper the *Sunday Worker*, and Kenneth Macpherson, editor of the pioneer film magazine *Close Up*, drew up a scheme to start a workers' film society, with membership dues within the reach of people unable to afford the Film

Society basic subscription of 25 shillings a year.

It was to be a year before this scheme got off the ground, but the latter half of 1929 saw the start of two organisations intending to show films to workers. First, the Federation of Workers' Film Societies (FOWFS), with Ralph Bond as one of its founding members, which was effectively the realisation of the scheme thought up the previous year by Dobb and Macpherson. Although the FOWFS had been conceived on a broad basis, there were those who voiced serious objections to the dominant role played by Communists on the management board. The situation was more clear cut with the Masses Stage and Film Guild (MSFG), founded almost simultaneously as an Independent Labour Party affair to organise about five film shows and two stage performances a season for its members.

Earlier that year, the film critic of the

ILP weekly the *New Leader* (writing under the pen-name 'Benn') had published a series of articles investigating the possibilities of using films for the socialist cause. In the article 'How Labour Can Use the Films', he points out that it had proved possible for Socialists to break through the capitalist press monopoly, and that it ought to be possible to achieve a similar victory in the area of film. (Ironically, when 'Benn' wrote this he was referring to the Labour Party's newspaper the *Daily Herald*, which shortly afterwards fell into the hands of Odhams, the big publishing concern.) In another article (May, 1929), 'Benn' tried to outline possible schemes for the production, distribution and exhibition of socialist films, drawing on the example of existing organisations such as the amateur film associations and the Film Society. 'If . . . we want the working class point of view in films, we can only get it, apart from Russian films, in films that we would make ourselves. A Workers' Film Society for production purposes is necessary; we have the talent and we have the energy—all that is needed is determination and that first initial united push.' 'Benn' optimistically continues: 'When perhaps we have formed our Workers' Film Society for production and projection, we can be certain of a tremendous response from the workers themselves. When once they have seen working class films they will never again be satisfied with the hollow mockeries of Elstree, of Hollywood and of Neubabelsberg.' Finally, in an article headed 'Why Not a Socialist Newsreel', 'Benn' suggested that the Socialist movement ought to investigate the possibility of making a newsreel 'that would act as a real educational weapon on behalf of Socialism and World Peace, and a defence against the dope with which cinemas are now flooded.'

From the possibilities outlined by 'Benn', a few were indeed put into effect, such as the exhibition of socialist films (not only from the Soviet Union but also from Germany) and the production of newsreels by the movement itself. This was achieved, however, only in the face of fierce resistance from the censorship organisations.

Censorship

Of the societies affiliated to the FOWFS, the first to start showing films was the London Workers' Film Society. Even before they screened their first programmes, however, they came up against the LCC's censorship measures. In a pamphlet titled 'The Political Censorship of Films' (1929), Ivor Montagu points towards the ambiguity of British censorship legislation. The 1909 Cinematograph Act, largely concerned with the protection of the public against fire risks, left censorship decisions to the local authorities; in effect, most authorities followed the rulings of the BBFC, the censorship body which had been set up by the film industry itself. If a film was turned down by the BBFC, there were still ways by which it could be legally shown. It could be shown on safety stock (as was the case with nearly all 16 mm films a few years later); it could be shown with local authority permission (a method successfully exploited in some places with a Labour controlled

council); or it could be shown in the context of a private club, using halls which were not licensed for public exhibition.

For its first performance, the LWFS had rented the Gaiety Cinema, but the LCC refused permission to use this cinema for a series of Sunday lunch-time screenings. An unlicensed hall in Tooting, owned by the local Co-op, provided the opportunity to show films such as Grigori Stabovoi's *Two Days* (shown in November 1929) and Piel Jutzi's *Hunger in Waldenburg* (December 1929). Next year, the LWFS ran into renewed difficulties when it again tried to use a regular cinema: a request to the LCC for permission to show *Potemkin* was refused. The *Daily Worker*, which had come to reinforce the Left press since January 1, 1930, ran a column almost every week about banned Soviet films, under the heading 'Films Which Workers May Not See'; examples included *New Babylon*, *Potemkin* and *Storm Over Asia*. But Victor Turin's *Turksib*, about the construction of a railway from Turkestan to Siberia, was passed by the BBFC. And with the exhibition of this film at the New Scala Theatre the LWFS obtained considerable publicity, partly thanks to the fact that Turin himself was present to introduce it. This particular show, on March 9, 1930, was important for another reason: the programme included the first workers' newsreel, dealing with the massive demonstration by the unemployed held at Tower Hill on March 6, 1930 and organised by the NUWM. This was to be only the first of a series of newsreels made

by the FOWFS over the next eighteen months. To the best of our knowledge, nearly all this material has unfortunately been lost.

The MSFG also came into the news in March 1930 because of publicity caused by the LCC ban on Pudovkin's *Mother*. Indignation was heightened by the fact that the Film Society had been allowed to screen *Mother* the previous season, and a statement protesting against the LCC's decision was signed by Keynes, Shaw, Bertrand Russell and others. It made the point that 'The only difference between the Society and the Guild seems to be that the subscription of the former excludes poorer sections of the community from membership, whilst that of the latter is fixed at a rate within reach of the working class.' The film's distributor, encouraged by the publicity, decided to submit it to the Labour-dominated West Ham Borough Council, a local authority which had distinguished itself by enterprising slum clearance schemes. The Council passed the film for exhibition in licensed cinemas within the borough, a decision which showed the LCC's attempt to stop the MSFG from screening the film to be counter-productive; for now access to the screening was no longer limited to MSFG members, but the general public could purchase tickets if they so wanted. Moreover, other borough councils followed suit and passed films for public exhibition.

The Tories retaliated with a hefty tome from the Conservative Central Office, in which it was claimed that there was a rising

tide of subversive Soviet films threatening to engulf the British Isles. They damaged their own credibility, however, by attacking as a threat to the state even films which had already been passed by the BBFC. The Tories attempted to establish the existence of systematic links between the activities of the Film Society, the LWFS, Atlas Film (the FOWFS distribution company), *Close Up* and the Komintern, with Ivor Montagu as the master brain pulling the strings behind the scenes. The Red Menace had now clothed itself in celluloid. For convenience sake, these Tories affected to forget that the interest of *Close Up* and the Film Society in Soviet cinema was fundamentally different from the interest of the organisations affiliated with the FOWFS. The upshot of all these activities was that the fight against censorship had now become an explicitly political issue, in which the usual arguments about the integrity of the work of art receded into the background. Definitive exemption from censorship was obtained only in relation to 16 mm safety film, a format which began to be more widely used towards the middle of the 1930s. But this exemption also meant that the use of regular cinemas had to be left to the commercial film industry.

During the 1930-31 season, the FOWFS and the MSFG succeeded in putting on films such as Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* (LWFS) and Dovzhenko's *Earth* (MSFG). The number of societies affiliated with the FOWFS had grown substantially, and new societies had been formed in

Unemployment Day demonstration: March 6, 1930



Cardiff, Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh and elsewhere. Nevertheless, the end of this particular movement drew near fairly rapidly. This was the period of general crisis in the international workers' movement, which manifested itself within Britain (Ramsay MacDonald's betrayal) as well as on the continent (the divisions within the Left in the face of the rise of National Socialism). Also, the spread of the sound film, with the attendant increase in monopolisation, made the production of progressive films more difficult in capitalist countries. (The Soviet Union was much slower in adapting to sound.) Slowly, the movement petered out; Atlas Film went out of business, and the last major achievement of the LWFS was to be the screening of the Soviet sound film *The Blue Express*.

The Plebs Polemic

In 1930-31, *The Plebs*, the monthly publication of the National Council of Labour Colleges, featured an extensive discussion of the activities of the FOWFS and its affiliated organisations, the LWFS in particular. In 1929, the magazine had run a series of articles about the mass media headed 'Dope Distributors'. In the November 1930 issue, Huntly Carter, author of the book *The New Spirit in the Cinema*, analysed the situation in Britain in an article titled 'Labour and the Cinema'. Carter concluded that the unholy marriage between amateurs of art (the Film Society) and politics (FOWFS) could only be harmful for the movement: 'Nothing is being done by responsible cinema folk to remind our workers that they are in the presence of new forces in their own country that cry aloud to be screened.' However, he expressed an optimistic confidence that it wouldn't be long before the production of workers' films got going in Britain.

In his critical review of *The New Spirit in the Cinema*, 'Benn' pointed out that Carter's call for an English equivalent of *Turksib* in fact rested on a number of false assumptions, and he aggressively entitled his review 'The Cinema, an Instrument of Class Rule', concluding with the warning that in the final analysis, 'Working class cinema, like capitalist class cinema, must arise from and be an expression of working class political rule.' In other words, an English equivalent of *Turksib* is impossible because in England the social order is still capitalist. In a subsequent article, Carter returned, with a variety of arguments, to the case for the production of British Labour films. 'What this country needs is the planning and centralisation of the Labour cinema world, and a British Labour Five Years Cinema Plan.'

Ralph Bond replied, in a later issue of *The Plebs*, to some of Carter's sharp criticism of the FOWFS, drawing attention to the fact that they had already begun making newsreels and documentaries. 'We can and must fight capitalist influences in the Cinema by exposing, in a Marxist manner, how it is used as an ideological force to dope the workers. That can be done by exhibiting the films of the only country where the workers are the ruling class, and by making our own films, not to initiate "new spirits" and "new religions" but to aid and

encourage the workers in their fight against capitalism.' It appeared that Carter had in fact no reply to Bond's arguments, and resorted instead to digging up such irritating old standbys as the argument that there were hardly any real workers among the LWFS audiences.

Although one could hardly claim that the debate had been conducted on a particularly high level, the arguments were significant enough to warrant a brief résumé of the contending points of view. 'Benn' argued that in the final analysis film is a reflection of the dominant order, and that by definition it is therefore impossible to have a socialist film production within a capitalist society. Carter maintained that there were a whole series of subjective factors which kept the Labour movement from producing films, thus ignoring the reality of the situation (lack of production opportunities, censorship, etc.). When all is said and done, Carter arrives at the same conclusion as the report drawn up by the Conservatives: the undesirability of the unholy alliance between artistic and political cinephiles. Bond's contribution is the most constructive, perhaps because he (unlike Carter) was closely involved with the movement on a practical level. The two main issues in Bond's argument are the use of film as an educational tool for the workers and the screening of Soviet films as an example of the way that film can be developed in a proletarian society; which also meant, of course, that it was necessary to fight censorship of Soviet films.

From 35 mm to 16 mm

In 1931, the periodical *Arbeiterbühne und Film* published an article headed 'Agitpropisierung des proletarischen Films'. The article laid great stress on the opportunities offered the workers' movement by the new cheap, non-inflammable 16 mm film stock. But it seems improbable that this article was known in Britain, and certainly the opportunities afforded by the new format were not quickly seized on. It was not until the mid-1930s that groups gradually started forming for the production of 16 mm films.

One of the first groups to concern itself with 16 mm was the Socialist Film Council, consisting of a number of left wing intellectuals from the Labour Party. Rudolph Messel, film critic of the weekly *New Clarion*, acted as spokesman for a group which also included the Labour historian Raymond Postgate* and Terence Greenidge, who played an important role in the English amateur film world.

For their first film, *The Road to Hell*, the group obtained the services of the feminist writer Naomi Mitchison. George Lansbury, the Labour veteran who had been largely responsible for the success of the *Daily Herald*, became chairman of the board. It is interesting to note that Lansbury was Postgate's father-in-law and that the latter's wife Daisy had a part in *The Road to Hell*. One could say that the Socialist Film Council consisted of a fairly closed group of intellectuals who were fired by idealism to undertake the production of films for workers, and more particularly those workers

who were members of the Labour movement. Messel began (March 11, 1933) by sounding out readers of his *New Clarion* column: 'It would be interesting to know whether any of my readers are in possession of small-size film cameras, and whether they would be willing to cooperate with us in securing shots of local conditions which could be collected and then distributed to Labour Parties under the title of "What the Newsreel Does Not Show".'

A few weeks later, having already informed his readers of his work on *The Road to Hell* (described as 'a film about the Means Test'), Messel announced his plan for making 'Talkies for Socialists'. Finally, the SFC did complete the production of *The Road to Hell* as a silent film, and it was screened in the summer of 1933.

Two reviews give an impression of the kind of work the SFC was doing. John Grierson had been given a page in the *New Clarion* to vent his criticisms, and he begins by rejecting the excuses the film-makers had offered for the poor technical quality of their work. 'They should have saved their emphasis, because in every technical respect the film was well enough made. It was the more important issue of it that bothered. Note first the title. Like much that follows it, its silly sensationalism echoes pre-occupations far other than political... The story that follows is equally queer from an ideological point of view.'

The plot tells of the father of a working class family who is injured by a car driven by a young playboy paying more attention to his girl friend than to the road. Because of this accident, the father becomes unemployed, and Grierson wonders why Messel chose this particular incident as an example rather than attempting to deal with the real, fundamental causes of unemployment. The working class family becomes increasingly hard up and finally the mother has to ask the Public Assistance Committee for help, which is denied because one of the sons is still bringing in some money. Grierson also wonders why the Labour representative on the Committee was not shown in the film, since it would have been his job to fight such decisions to refuse assistance. The end of the film wallows in unmitigated misery: one son, an artist, has to abandon his studies and commits suicide, while the other son is caught stealing. Grierson comments: 'Promise of action, organisation of action, the film does not begin to suggest.'

Writing in *Cinema Quarterly*, Basil Wright was equally severe: 'If it is propaganda for anything, it is propaganda for the worst type of defeatism. If the working classes of England behave as the particular family in this film does under the pressure of bad government and worse administration, there is no hope for anyone.' But Wright nevertheless drew attention to the method of production of *The Road to Hell* (16 mm, 40 minutes, cost: £66) and suggested that it opened up many possibilities.

Although it would appear that no copy of *The Road to Hell* has survived, these two reviews provide enough material to form an opinion as to the shortcomings of the Socialist Film Council. The film appears typical of the ideological vacuum in which the Labour movement had landed itself by the early 1930s. Grierson points out that it

* Later to be the founder of *The Good Food Guide*.

doesn't mention basic causes of unemployment and that it suggests no possibilities for action. Precisely these accusations could be levelled at the Labour movement as a whole. Only the NUWM, an organisation in which the Communists had been forced to play the major part because of the Socialists' refusal to cooperate, fought—very efficiently—for the rights of the unemployed. If *The Road to Hell* had shown the work of the NUWM, something no film about the Means Test could have avoided, its makers could quite possibly have got into trouble with the Labour leadership.

Next on the schedule of the SFC, which distributed its own films, was a project for an anti-war film. In the middle of the 1930s, George Lansbury figured as leader of the pacifist wing of the Labour Party, and an anti-war film could have been a useful propaganda weapon in his campaign. However, the film *Blow Bugles Blow*, illustrating a successful general strike against war, was not released until 1938; moreover, it was released by the ILP. The reason for this was that Lansbury's group had been defeated in the Labour Party, which left it up to the ILP to continue carrying the banner of pacifism, and when Messel left the Labour Party in 1938 to join the ILP, he took *Blow Bugles Blow* with him.

Throughout the 1930s, members of the Workers' Film and Photo League, the Socialist counterpart of the bourgeois amateur film associations, produced a number of films dealing with events important for the working class. The best known examples are the shorts about the hunger march of 1936, *March Against Starvation*, about the Means Test, *Bread*, and one dealing with the campaign about the special winter allowances for the unemployed, *Winter*. Some of these films were distributed by Kino, others by the League itself; and although the League never played a leading role culturally, its work at the grass roots level was important.

Most of the League's films have been lost, but fortunately a few did survive. In 1935, the bourgeois media were devoting inordinate attention to the celebration of King George V's Silver Jubilee. Two North London teachers, the Green brothers, made the film *Jubilee*, giving an impression of the extent of the coverage of this event and showing the cameras of the industry's commercial newsreels. *Jubilee* suggests that the National Government wanted to focus attention on the spectacle, in the hope that the voters would forget about the appalling record of government policies on unemployment and slum clearance.

Another ten-minute short, *The Busmen's Holiday*, was made partly in colour and showed the May Day demonstration of the London busmen who had come out on strike in the spring of 1937. This particular strike was attacked not only by the Government but also by the Trade Union leadership in the person of Ernest Bevin, general secretary of the TGWU. The strike leaders, held in high regard by the union rank and file, were suspended by their union. This short offers a highly necessary though limited counterpart to the general media propaganda, with its emphasis on the hardship and inconvenience caused by the

strike. It also includes (very rare) footage showing Tom Mann, the veteran activist of the workers' movement. In spite of their obvious limitations—the films were mostly silent and the technical quality was not always up to standard—these short documentaries did provide some sort of reply to the solidly reactionary commercial newsreels.

With the setting up of Kino in the summer of 1934, an organised 16 mm distribution circuit began to take shape. Gradually, Kino built up a library of Soviet classics on 16 mm safety stock: *Potemkin*, *The End of St. Petersburg*, *Storm Over Asia* and *New Babylon*. This meant that finally these films could be shown without interference by the censors. Kino was officially registered as a distribution company in 1935. The industry viewed with some dismay the development of 16 mm film and the related exemption from censorship. A proposal to extend the 1909 Cinematograph Act, to ensure that all films had to be submitted to censorship, was however shelved after encountering unexpected resistance from educational circles.

The Documentary Movement

In the 1930s the British film industry was in a difficult position. The coming of sound had increased the power of Hollywood, and only the controls brought in by the Quota Act (1927) managed to keep the industry ticking over. These were the years of the Quota Quickies, the cheaply and quickly made pictures designed to take advantage of quota requirements; in spite of Korda, who was making such successful pictures as *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, and Hitchcock, who was producing some of his most interesting work, the general level of British production was dispiritingly low. Throughout the 1930s, the Association of Ciné Technicians, founded in 1933, endeavoured to improve the position of its members in the industry, and after a lot of recriminations a new Quota Act was introduced in 1938; but even the new Act didn't really change anything.

Meanwhile, John Grierson and his followers were creating what came to be known as the British Documentary Movement; and in view of their reputation as progressives (a reputation they still enjoy today, although in recent years some change in this can be detected), it is necessary to look a little more closely at this group of film-makers. Grierson was a decidedly non-Marxist young radical with a strong belief in the educational potential of film, even to the point of maintaining that the crisis of capitalism could be overcome by better educating the people regarding their civic responsibility. His reformism, and his decision to work within official organisations (the EMB and the GPO) to propagate his ideas rather than in the context of political parties, was defended by Paul Rotha in his book *Documentary Film*: 'One of the documentary's greatest strengths over the years has been that we in Britain never allied ourselves to any political party.' Rotha went on to claim that he believed this to be 'fundamental to the documentary idea and purpose.'

Clearly, apart from his belief in the

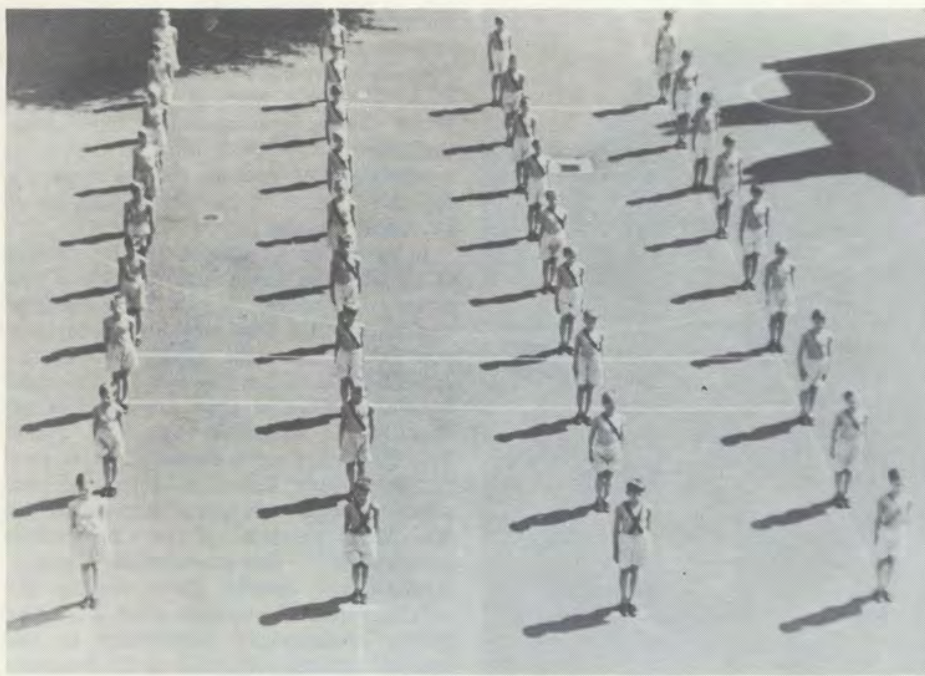
infallibility of documentaries, Paul Rotha overlooks the fact that state institutions are anything but ideologically neutral. Characteristic of the function of film as defined by the documentary movement is a film such as *Workers and Jobs*, made by Arthur Elton in 1935 for the Ministry of Labour. *Workers and Jobs* was intended to explain and inform about the function of the Labour Exchange; but the film shows its subject exclusively from the point of view of the employer, clearly spelling out the 'facilities' it can provide for him. Not a word about the problems of the workers, such as the still chronic unemployment.

Despite its very real limitations, the documentary movement produced a number of socially important films, although these were few in number in relation to the total output. In 1935, Anstey and Elton made *Housing Problems*, for the British Commercial Gas Association. The film is a penetrating illustration of the appalling conditions in which many of the working class were living, strengthening the campaign for a speeding up of slum clearance schemes and making an urgent plea for the allocation of more subsidies for council housing. Anstey's *Nutrition Film* (released as *Enough to Eat?*) was part of a drive to persuade those living on the very edge of the subsistence level (and there were a great many of them) to spend their scarce resources on food with greater nutritional value. In 1937, Ralph Bond and Ruby Grierson made *Today We Live* for the National Council of Social Services; and the sections directed by Bond are specially important. In Pentre, a South Wales mining village, a scheme to build a community centre was mooted. The miners asked for and obtained help from the NCSS. Bond allowed the unemployed miners to determine the script of the film for themselves; and the result was that it ended up emphasising the limitations of the NCSS. One of the miners in the film points out that the NCSS apparently has money to spend on a community centre but is unable to provide people with work, which is in fact the central issue at stake. Cautiously, the film implies that a policy designed to 'brighten' the lives of people in the distressed areas was no more than a sop.

But on the whole, and with a few exceptions, it is reasonable to say that the films made by the documentary movement propagated bourgeois ideology and—largely unconsciously—were directed against the interests of the British working class. After all, this comes as no surprise when one considers the nature of the institutions for which these films were made.

The Thirties Movement

The political consciousness of a number of intellectuals and artists dates from the 1930s. Within the Communist Party of Great Britain, the number of intellectuals had always been rather small, with the consequence that theoretical work had never been one of the Party's priorities. The founding of the magazine the *Left Review* in 1934 is generally regarded as a turning point in the development of Marxist cultural politics in Britain. At the same time,



Aspects of documentary: 'Children at School' (Basil Wright, 1937); 'Today We Live' (Ralph Bond, Ruby Grierson, 1937)

several books attempted for the first time to put forward a Marxist view of English cultural history; the most significant among them being *Illusion and Reality* and *Studies in a Dying Culture* by Christopher Caudwell (pseudonym of Christopher St. John Sprigg), who was killed on the Jarama front in Spain in January 1937. The publication of the collection of essays *The Mind in Chains* in 1937 was also significant: it was the first British publication to deal exclusively with Marxist views of culture and science.

In 1936 the Unity Theatre was founded, uniting the survivors of the earlier Left theatre movement. Under the direction of Herbert Marshall, a former student of Eisenstein in Moscow, plays such as Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* and Brecht's *Frau Carrar's Rifles* were staged, as well as such home-grown enterprises as *Living Newspaper*, dealing with the London busmen's strike. And, also in 1936, the pub-

lisher Victor Gollancz, the Socialist Harold Laski and the Marxist John Strachey set up the Left Book Club, which within a year of its foundation mustered over 40,000 members. A monthly club bulletin, *Left News*, included reports on the activities of the Left Book Club groups, local discussion groups who formed their own theatre groups, invited visiting speakers (the publication of the Club book of the month was often accompanied by a lecture tour by the author) and showed films.

But this development of a Marxist cultural critique made almost no impact on film criticism. The contribution of Arthur Calder-Marshall to *The Mind in Chains* could stand as a witness to the fact: in his essay 'The Film Industry', Calder-Marshall merely repeats the usual platitudes about the differences between a capitalist and a socialist film—socialist films emphasise the masses as opposed to the individual, Soviet films are optimistic while capitalist

films are pessimistic (Calder-Marshall cites Pabst's *Kameradschaft* as an example). Neither were the contributions to the *Left Review* anything more than conventional film reviews. The reasons why no Marxist film theory was developed are difficult to pinpoint, and the unavailability of any copies of *Left Film Front*, the Workers' Film and Photo League magazine, doesn't make things easier. The wave of politicisation never seems to have touched the old collaborators of *Close Up*, except for Ivor Montagu who had joined the Communist Party of Great Britain as early as 1929. This meant that the only group of people in Britain who had been intensively engaged in problems of film theory (not counting the theoreticians of the documentary movement) was in fact inactive. Those who were actively involved with left wing film distribution or production presumably lacked the time and energy to concentrate on theoretical problems. And it is likely that the necessity for theoretical work didn't make itself felt all that clearly when a number of films could in fact be directly and effectively inserted into current political campaigns.

Films and Political Action

From the middle of the 1930s onwards, film came to be used increasingly in the context of political campaigns, more especially in those campaigns where the various Left groups were able to form an unofficial kind of united front. Two organisations in particular played a key role in this development: the 16 mm distributor Kino and the Progressive Film Institute under the direction of Ivor Montagu. Originally the PFI had been founded to distribute important political films which had been unable to secure a British distributor; the concentration was on 35 mm films, leaving the 16 mm library to Kino. Soon, however, the PFI found itself engaged in film production as well.

The first film they distributed was called *Free Thaelmann*, and dealt with the campaign carried on throughout Europe in the summer of 1935 to free the leader of the KPD, who had been imprisoned by the Nazis. The film was put together out of footage obtained from German exiles, and Kino took charge of its 16 mm distribution. *Free Thaelmann* was used in July 1935 in the campaign by the Relief Committee for Victims of Fascism. The usual way of screening the film involved hiring a hall; after the show there would be speeches (Montagu often accompanied the film himself) and a collection.

At the first AGM of Kino, on April 26, 1936, a serious argument developed about the kind of films that Kino ought to make, if it went ahead with its plans to move into production. George Elvin, the general secretary of the ACT, represented the point of view of the Labour Party, which had just been discussing matters of film policy. Elvin argued that propaganda had to be conducted via the commercial cinema, since the screenings at film societies and political meetings would be tantamount to preaching to the converted. Ivor Montagu took the opposite view, pointing towards the enormous capital investment required for commercial production and advising



'Defence of Madrid': Ivor Montagu and Norman McLaren got footage of the bombing

Kino to concentrate on making documentaries. This was the line that both Kino and the PFI were to follow over the next few years.

The next PFI production was *Defence of Madrid*, released around New Year 1937, and the film in many ways typifies both the strengths and weaknesses of political film-making in the late 1930s in Britain. In October 1936, Ivor Montagu had gone to Madrid, with Norman McLaren as cameraman, to film the siege of the city by Franco's rebel troops. They got footage of the bombing of Madrid, of the International Brigade and its leader Hans Beimler (who was killed shortly afterwards) and of the Republican People's Militia. On their return to England, the film was edited in record time, and although a lot of the material was shot in colour *Defence of Madrid* was released in black and white as a silent film, since the makers had no access to sufficiently sophisticated technical processing facilities for colour and sound. The

surviving copy of the film shows the pre-history of the Civil War, the intervention of Germany and Italy and the consequences of Franco's bombing raids on Madrid; the International Brigade footage appears to have been lost. Later it was estimated that the film had brought in over £6,000 in collections and donations for such purposes as medical aid. It was widely shown, as can be seen from a random sample of the booking sheets during one week in February 1937: February 16, Edmonton (proceeds £72 7s 11d); Feb. 17, East Ham (£12 4s 5d) and Rochdale (£38 14s); Feb. 18, Shettleston (£7), Gloucester (£22) and Bermondsey (£20). These screenings were organised by the local Labour Party, the CPGB and the trade unions.

Defence of Madrid was followed by a series of films about the Spanish Civil War. In April 1937, the PFI released *News from Spain*, a compilation of Republican film footage with a commentary spoken by Isabel Brown. Kino followed shortly after-

wards with the Spanish film *A Call to Arms*; and in July brought out *Crime Against Madrid*, incorporating all of *A Call to Arms* with additional material covering more recent events. This stream of films about the Spanish Civil War must of course be seen in the context of the wave of sympathy for the Iberian peninsula which swept Britain at the time.

In 1937 Kino switched to the distribution of sound films, which involved radical and expensive renewal of all its projection equipment. But this also put Kino in a position to undertake distribution of the remarkable Irish film *The Dawn*, a non-commercial production about the Irish Civil War. In the winter of 1937, Joris Ivens' *Spanish Earth* became entangled in the web of the British Board of Film Censors, which wanted to suppress sections of the film which contradicted the Chamberlain government's non-intervention policy. Nevertheless, *Spanish Earth* became the only film about the Spanish Civil War to be shown commercially (admittedly in the 'quality' cinemas only, such as the Academy in London) as well as in the non-commercial context of 16 mm distribution.

The extent to which the use of films in political campaigns came to be accepted can be gauged from the fact that the Co-operative Movement concluded a special contract with Kino for the use of their Spanish films in the Coop's campaign 'Milk for Spain'. Another event which sparked off a wave of protest was the Japanese invasion of China. The Left Book Club chose Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China* as book of the month, and Kino followed up with the release of *China Strikes Back*, a film shot by the American cameraman Harry Dunham in Shensi Province, where Mao and the Red Army then had their headquarters. This was the first of a series of films which Kino took over from its American counterpart.

In the spring and summer of 1938, the PFI continued to bring out some remarkable film shot by its camera team in Spain. Negrin's Republican government had made available some £3,000—enough to make about three short films chronicling events. Montagu and a team of technicians travelled to Spain, but Franco's advance played havoc with their plans. They nevertheless returned with the footage for *Spanish ABC* (directed by Thorold Dickinson), shot according to plan, and with a great deal more material, some of which was made into *Behind the Spanish Lines* by Sidney Cole. The remaining footage consisted mainly of interrogations of German and Italian prisoners of war and was made into two separate films: *Prisoners Prove Intervention in Spain* and *Testimony of Non-Intervention*. Both films documented the untenability of the so-called policy of non-intervention, and they were used as evidence at the Emergency Conference for Spain in April 1938 and (to no great effect, Ivor Montagu remembers) at the debates of the League of Nations in Geneva.

The relationship Kino had established with its American counterpart came in usefully in connection with the Czechoslovakian crisis. In September 1938, at the height of the crisis, Hitler stood poised to invade 'to defend the rights of the Sudeten Germans'; and Kino released the film

Czechoslovakia. Another American film given a release was *Tenants Rent Strike*, which demonstrated that such actions could be won if the participants were well enough organised. In the summer of 1938 a number of rent strikes had taken place in the East End and elsewhere, in protest against extortionate rents demanded for slum properties; and by its distribution of the American film, Kino showed itself able to remain in close contact with the immediate political realities.

Britain Expects! was the last PFI film dealing with the Spanish situation, its subject being the increase in piracy committed by Fascist ships and planes operating out of Spain, and the threat to the lives of British seamen. It is perhaps worth noting that the 'Red Duchess' of Atholl, standing as an Independent in the West Perthshire by-election, used the film in her campaign (December, 1938). She was nevertheless defeated by her Conservative opponent. Apart from some Soviet films, and the extremely important *Peace and Plenty* (to be discussed later), Kino did not release any more new films in 1939. The outbreak of war in September 1939 made the importation of films from abroad virtually impossible for Kino, while its operations were further handicapped by the progressively more stringent wartime restrictions.

The Film Service of the Labour Movement: the Workers' Film Association

In his book *Documentary Diary*, Paul Rotha bemoans the fact that the Labour movement's attitude towards film as a medium was basically hostile: 'Labour did not even have an aesthetic approach, let alone a social one.' In a way, Rotha's complaint is justified. There is little doubt that he would have loved to make films for the Labour movement but was not given the opportunity to do so, largely because the Labour leadership was foolish enough simply to leave the use of the medium to its opponents. But Rotha is less than accurate when he suggests that absolutely nothing happened about film within the Labour movement. Local constituency Labour Party branches, trade unions and various cooperatives were among Kino's more regular customers. The virulent anti-Communism that pervaded the top of the Labour Party found little echo at the base, where they really didn't care whether the distributor was a 'Communist' organisation or not provided that the films were useful.

On top of this, Labour's own plans for setting up a film service were extremely slow to develop. In fact, it was not until April 1936 that the Labour Party in conjunction with the TUC let it be known, via a jointly drafted circular, that they intended to create their own film service. The circular was titled 'Labour Cinema Propaganda', and it opened with a quotation from Heraclitus: 'The eyes are more exact witnesses than the ears.' The statement proclaims: 'In the interests of the Labour Movement, and of the working class generally, it is imperative that Labour should organise its own Film Propaganda without delay.' The circular proposes the setting up

of local film societies, which would have to be broadly based in order to avoid 'preaching to the converted'. A questionnaire appended to the document invited people to provide information about local conditions. Those who were associated with Kino in fact welcomed this joint Labour/TUC initiative, though they expressed fears that the plan outlined might steer the Labour movement in the direction of the commercial cinema, especially since the circular made no mention of 16 mm films. It seems probable that this fear derived in fact from other factors, as the accompanying questionnaire didn't give the impression of focusing on the commercial cinema either.

Before the start of the Labour Party Conference in Edinburgh in September 1936, they held a special meeting to discuss matters related to the use of film, with Paul Rotha as one of the speakers. This led to the creation of a Joint Film Committee with representatives from both the Labour Party and the TUC, with a brief to draw up a report on the situation by July 1937. The finished report emphasised the absolute necessity for collaboration with the Co-operative Film Committee, to avoid duplication of work and waste of resources. It went on to make a series of suggestions concerning film production, such as the possible cooperation of several unions within one branch of industry or the setting up of a large central fund.

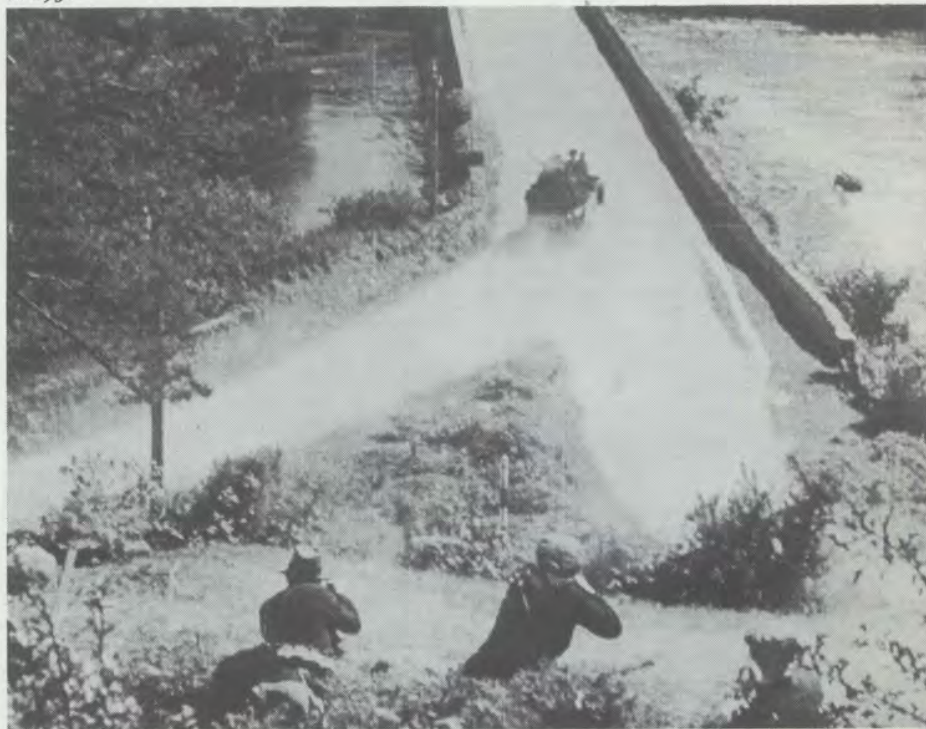
By the second half of the 1930s, the Co-operative movement had developed quite an activity in the area of film. In order not to lag behind its competitors, the Co-operative Wholesale Society had inevitably found itself using films for advertising purposes. In 1937 Frank Cox, a member of the political committee of the London Co-operative Society, made several 16 mm documentaries, such as *The People Who Count* and *Peace Parade*, dealing with pacifist demonstrations organised by the movement. Early in 1937, *Reynolds News*, in collaboration with Cox, invited its

readers to take part in a film script competition; the winner was announced, though despite the paper's promises the script was never filmed. Cox's own next film ? *Utopia*, described as 'an entertaining skit upon the Tory point of view about slums, rehousing, malnutrition and rearmament,' obviously fitted very well into the plans of the Joint Film Committee.

In the meantime, Joseph Reeves, general secretary of the Co-operative Film Committee, had succeeded in persuading four London Coops to join in the elaboration of a five year film plan, aiming to produce a £1,000 film each year. Ralph Bond was entrusted with the first in the series, and in the summer of 1938 he delivered *Advance, Democracy*. The central characters are a docker and his wife, the latter active in the Co-operative movement. The husband doesn't really see the point, but the wife persuades him to listen to a speech on the radio. The speaker is A. V. Alexander, one of the leaders of the Parliamentary Co-operative Party, recounting the history of the movement from the first Coop in Rochdale to the present world-wide organisation. Alexander points out that fascism is threatening to destroy the movement and its ideals, and he calls on all democratic forces to unite in the fight against fascism. The husband suddenly gains a deeper understanding of his own union activities in the docks and now also fully appreciates his wife's work for the Coop. The end of the film shows them both marching in a huge May Day demonstration, with Socialist songs in the background. The leading roles were played by Harry Baker, a member of the Unity Theatre, and Kathleen Gibbons, who at that time was in the news because her husband had been captured by Franco's troops. In spite of its limitations (Alexander's history lesson appears distinctly perfunctory and stereotyped), *Advance, Democracy* did constitute a fair example of the kind of films the Labour movement was to produce.

The final result of the work of the Joint

'The Dawn': Kino distributed this feature about the Irish rebellion, made by Tom Cooper in Killarney in 1936

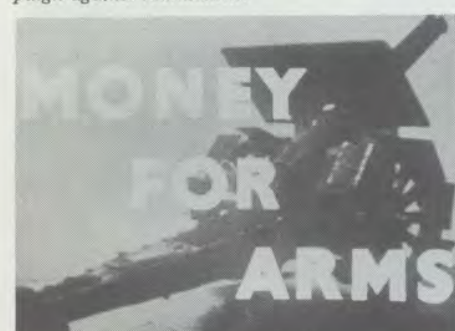




'Peace and Plenty': a sequence in the British Communist Party's only film

Committee was to be the Workers' Film Association, in which the Cooperative Film Committee participated. The energetic Joseph Reeves became general secretary of the WFA, and at the TUC Congress in Blackpool in September 1938, the WFA manifested itself for the first time, showing the delegates, among other films, *Advance, Democracy and Spanish Earth*. Initially the WFA concentrated on encouraging the use of film in Labour circles, relying on the services of Kino to obtain material for the screenings. As far as production was concerned, the WFA plans had to be cancelled because of the outbreak of war. Nevertheless, in the autumn of 1939 the London Cooperatives still managed to implement the second stage of their five year plan with the completion of two more films (*The Voice of Democracy* and *People with a Purpose*). The war cancelled the rest of

'The Peace Film': made by Paul Rotha and others in 1936, this 3-minute short was part of the campaign against rearmament



their plan, as it did the trade union schemes for producing films—although one film, *The Builders*, had already been financed via the WFA by the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers.

Peace and Plenty

In September 1938, the Communist Party of Great Britain held its 15th Party Congress in Birmingham. The two main themes were the fight against fascism by means of the formation of an international peace front by Britain, France, the USA and the Soviet Union, and the struggle against the policies of the National Government by means of a British Popular Front. The Party secretary, Harry Pollitt, spoke on 'Economic Security, Peace and Democracy', ending his speech with a vigorous plea to the Labour leadership to come to its senses and form a united front against the Chamberlain government. The CPGB was in a period of marked growth, with a membership that had risen to nearly 16,000 and a steadily increased circulation for its paper, the *Daily Worker*. Ivor Montagu made a short ten-minute sound film about the congress, *The XVth Congress Film*, which was used primarily for recruiting purposes.

Afterwards, the CPGB commissioned the PFI to make a film along the political line agreed upon at the congress. Moreover, the film would come in useful at the next general election, which was scheduled for 1939. Montagu and his colleagues agreed to make the film, shot it in the winter of 1938–39, and called it *Peace and Plenty*. The film focused exclusively on the policies of the National Government and their consequences for the British working class. It opens with a series of statistics and charts showing that, in spite of the election promises of 1935, the National Government made no improvements in areas of nutrition, housing, education, agriculture or industry. After pointing out the links between various ministers and big business, the film compares the promises made by a number of ministers in their election speeches with their actual policies. Still photographs are dynamically used to point the contrast, and the film uses stills and a puppet figure to achieve a remarkably acute analytical portrait of Chamberlain himself. *Peace and Plenty* ends with images of the devastation caused by fascism in Spain and China, followed by a short speech by Harry Pollitt (Ivor Montagu has said that he kept it short on purpose, distrusting audiences' patience with the spoken word), calling on the British people to unite against the Chamberlain government.

Peace and Plenty is unquestionably the most important political film made in Britain in the 1930s.* Lasting approximately 25 minutes, the film expresses

*In an interview published in *Skrien*, Ivor Montagu recalls a screening of *Peace and Plenty* at the House of Commons. 'Members of Parliament were invited to see how film could be used to political effect, whatever their persuasion. I remember the place was absolutely packed... Afterwards, it was very entertaining to hear the MPs as they went away saying to one another "Now that's the thing we ought to have for our Party." They didn't seem to realise that the content had something to do with the force of the film, and not every party could make such a bitter, acid film.'

succinctly, almost cynically, the lamentable failures of Chamberlain's government. Although the British film is much shorter, and contains no fiction sequences, there are points of comparison with *La Vie est à Nous*, the film Jean Renoir made for the French Communist Party in 1936. Both films were based on reports by the respective Party Secretaries—Renoir's on Maurice Thorez' report 'L'Union de la Nation Française', *Peace and Plenty* on Pollitt's speech at the Congress—and both found a satisfying film form to present the analyses put forward in these reports. It is worth noting that neither film-maker allowed himself to be tied down by too strict an observation of the dominant movie conventions. *La Vie est à Nous* contains a purposeful combination of documentary and fiction sequences, while *Peace and Plenty* uses a wide range of elements: charts, stills, a mixture of black and white footage with colour scenes. Both films not only gave expression to the idea of a Popular Front, but in fact constituted a practical result of that idea. Indeed, neither film could have been made without extensive collaboration from people outside the Party.

Peace and Plenty was released in the spring of 1939, and was to remain the British Communist Party's only film. Because of the war, the election the film had been made for didn't take place.

Film and the Left Book Club

Film activities of the Left Book Club fitted into the general framework of the time, in that its screenings as a rule were involved with political campaigns. In the spring of 1939, the LBC extended its activities and formed a group consisting of people working within the film industry, with the aim of discussing the position of British film workers. It was this group of people who conceived the idea of producing a film in collaboration with the LBC. The finance was to be raised in a manner similar to the raising of funds for Renoir's *La Marseillaise*; members of the LBC would pay for their tickets in advance and would eventually see the film at special screenings. The group proposed for the purpose a fiction film based on one of the LBC's recent books of the month: Ellen Wilkinson's *Jarrow, The Biography of a Town*. It would seem, however, that this project was never followed up; and that the only initiative for a political film put forward by people who were actually working in the industry died prematurely.

By September 1939, Britain was at war. Many of the people engaged on film work were called up; others became involved in official wartime propaganda. Although one cannot speak of a clean break but rather of a gradual transition, it seems fitting, because of the decisive political changes that took place, to end this survey at this point. ■

The main reference sources for this survey are the left wing newspapers and journals of the 1930s—the *Daily Worker*, *Daily Herald*, *New Leader*, *New Clarion*, *Left Review*, *The Plebs*, etc.—and the various books and articles quoted.

We are grateful to Stanley Forman for his help, and for letting us take frame stills from his print of *Peace and Plenty*.



Barry Lyndon



Decorum and violence: Redmond Barry's wedding; a quarrel with his stepson (Leon Vitali)

Penelope Houston

Barry Lyndon has not, on the whole, received a good press, and no one is likely to find this very surprising. The reviewers' pendulum could be sensed as poised for the down swing even before the film came out: elaborate, expensive (11 million dollars) and a very long time in the making, it simply didn't sound like a film for the times. That prescience and informed alertness about public states of mind (or minds in the making) which has carried Stanley Kubrick brilliantly and disquietingly through *Lolita*, *Dr Strangelove*, *2001* and *A Clockwork Orange* were evidently not this time factors to reckon with. In a significant way, Kubrick had shifted his ground. In fact, against the tone of the shaky but increasingly parsimonious 1970s, he has made a film that's visually luxurious enough to enrage Savonarola and morally austere enough not to dissatisfy John Knox: a risky undertaking.

Depth-sounding for motives, reviewers came up with their buckets empty, and with few exceptions found the film too cold, too deliberately beautiful, too muted, too drained of 'life'—and too baffling. 'No reason at all emerges for his personal enthusiasm,' wrote Patrick Gibbs in the *Daily Telegraph*; 'filmed in a way that leaves his intentions totally enigmatic,' added David Robinson next day in *The Times*; 'a view of things . . . that seems to me virtually indecipherable,' said Derek Malcolm in the *Guardian*. From across the Atlantic, Pauline Kael in the *New Yorker* suggested that 'he's taking pictures of art objects; that antiques-filled room at the end of 2001 must have been where he wanted his own time machine to land.' On leaving the press show, I should add, I was as puzzled as anyone else. *Barry Lyndon* is not an easily approachable work, perhaps partly—and perversely—because there's so much surface to it. What seems to have worried critics, to a surprising extent, is the dissonance between the prettiness of the settings and the pessimism of the theme. And bafflement begins not with the film itself, though there are areas there for perplexity, but with the question of intention. Why did the director whose computer intelligence had seemed programmed towards the 21st century take this step backwards, to a 19th century classic writer's least read novel, about the life and progress of an 18th century scoundrel? Why at all, and why now?

Kubrick himself is unlikely to tell us. At a time when the interview has become the secondary tool of movie criticism, and directors explain, justify, analyse and excuse at the click of a cassette switch, Kubrick rather admirably leaves the film to stand on its own, vulnerable but imperturbable, like one of Vanbrugh's great mansions (Castle Howard, perhaps, which does duty along with aspects of Stourhead for the scenes of Barry's passing glory). We don't even know how Kubrick hit on Thackeray's book as a subject. Since he announced the film, we've all been reading it, and with two paperback editions now in print *Barry Lyndon* may even find in 1976 something like the market Thackeray vainly hoped for when in 1844, under the wild pen-name of George Savage Fitzboodle, he embarked on serial publication in *Fraser's* magazine. But when Kubrick first announced the film (having, according to *Time* magazine, presented Warner Brothers with a version in which names, dates and places had been changed, in a deception tactic to prevent leaks about a source in the public domain), the novel was still relegated to the mustier shelves of the second-hand book shops.

As a film subject, *Barry Lyndon* has the advantage that it's a 'classic' with absolutely nothing sacrosanct about it. Thanks to informative articles by Ann Monsarrat and Margaret Forster, we know that Thackeray set out to write a best-seller and, like many others, found the going hard. 'Got through the fag-end of chapter four of *Barry Lyndon* with a great deal of dullness and unwillingness and labour,' he wrote in his diary. He took a cruise to try to finish the chore in peace, but only became seasick and ill, and finished the book, doggedly weary, in the Malta Quarantine Hospital. It didn't do well, and later in life

he spoke of it with loathing. His impetus had come from the story someone had told him of a fortune-hunting adventurer, Andrew Robinson Stoney, who monstrously ill-used the rich, titled and infatuated woman he'd bamboozled into marriage. By the time Thackeray reached this part of the book, however, he was already labouring. Sweated out against the grain, the novel moves jerkily from the happy vitality of its conception (the picaresque hero of tradition revealed as bully and sot and disreputably seedy scoundrel, through a first person narrative of blinding effrontery and self-satisfaction) to a dragging conclusion.

If the book is gravely flawed, at least it's never negligible. Reading it a couple of years ago, already hunting for clues to Kubrick's purposes, one thought one might have found some. There is, first, the essential Irishness of Redmond Barry. Was

exterior may not seem much changed, the material has in fact been radically rethought, in line with the director's view of life as a series of sprung traps. Kubrick doesn't enjoy the lashing of small-time snobs and wastrels as Thackeray did; he does away with the journalist's bustle of information; he is not noticeably seduced by the glamour of corruption. It isn't merely that the tale has lost gusto in its telling (the moments when Kubrick allows real physical energy to break out, getting down to ground level with the handheld camera, are almost all scenes of pain and humiliation) but that he has refashioned its morality, along occasionally surprising lines.

Thackeray's Redmond Barry is only fifteen when he's led up the garden path by his cousin Nora and duped into thinking that he has killed the vulgarian Captain Quin in

narrative method. The narrator (Michael Hordern) is gravely and objectively omniscient: he knows where Barry is heading and where he has been, and he is our only source for some of the action along the way. The Barry we're told about doesn't quite tally at several points with the Barry we actually see; so that the technique imposes distance and invites questions, opening up and then closing off perspectives. The camera style meanwhile establishes its own feeling of impersonal authority, pulling back time and again from detail to find distance and context, putting everything in its place, as though in the hands of an 18th century rationalist—less the baroque Vanbrugh than one of those landscape designers who tamed the countryside: Capability Kubrick. The technique, which is very deliberate indeed, puts people into a passive relationship with time and chance—



Barry (back to camera, left) encounters Lady Lyndon in the candlelit gaming room

Kubrick perhaps after a picture of that contentious and impossible race, with all the grand dreams and the moral squalor, through a not uncharacteristic representative? Then, the long central section of the book offers an almost Stendhalian view of military affairs (the hero never gets to see the battle, just as Fabrice misses Waterloo, and military 'glory' is murderer's work, the rifling of the corpse in the ditch), followed by an elaborate account of the intrigues and complex spy systems of the Prussian court—the familiar shabby ingenuities of power without responsibility. Or there is the twisted wooing of Lady Lyndon, a notably cold-blooded episode, almost worthy of Choderlos de Laclos, and perhaps material for the misanthrope in Kubrick.

One can only say that these added up to some pretty wrong guesses. Kubrick, who wrote his own script, has restructured the book like an architect reconditioning a house; and although to the casual eye the

a duel. Ryan O'Neal can hardly pass for a hobbled adolescent, so this Barry initially seems a slightly retarded victim of bucolic mercenary wiles, a man with a schoolboy's naiveté. Swiftly, he's crossed in love by a pert little schemer, allowed to think he has proved manhood in a duel when he has merely demonstrated gullibility (Kubrick, incidentally, has Barry's father killed in a duel in the film's opening shot, where Thackeray let him fall dead more lackadaisically at Chester races), and is then packed off on the road, where a highwayman with the pedantic manners of a schoolmaster promptly lifts his possessions. Barry is a blockhead nurtured on romantically misty Irish illusions, buoyed up by a little low cunning but fundamentally identified as a loser. If he learns the ways of a rogue, he never masters the arts of self-protection; and at intervals in his story the romantic schoolboy is waiting to break through.

From the outset, Kubrick sets up his

snatched away from Barry is the illusion (which is, of course, the mainspring of Thackeray's narrative method) that he's in control.

Kubrick does not think much of the human race, and in *Dr. Strangelove* and *A Clockwork Orange* most notably, he has given full vent to a caricaturist's misanthropy. The most accessibly 'human' character in his recent work is arguably HAL, the computer intelligence which dies with a song on its circuits. At the start of *Barry Lyndon*, the caricaturist shows his teeth (with Thackeray's full endorsement) in the portrait of the absurd Captain Quin: ogling the camera as he prances by, Leonard Rossiter is encouraged to take the character well over the top of any 'naturalistic' performance. Quin is an ignoble buffoon who represents a danger to Barry because of his £1,500 a year. He is caricatured to his mock death; and later Sir Charles Lyndon will be caricatured to 'real' death,

choking and gobbling his life out over the card-table like one of Gillray or Rowlandson's grosser inventions. The film is at times a reminder of the sheer ugliness of the 18th century, as recorded in all those caricatures of bulging men and women slobbering in the social piggery.

But caricature here is a fringe technique, not a method; and one of the problems that seems to have engaged Kubrick in *Barry Lyndon* is the perennial one of the storyteller's precise relation to his subject. We follow Barry quite closely as he escapes from the imbrolios at home, joins the army as the only career for a penniless young runaway, sees action in the Seven Years War, deserts from the English army and muddles his affairs so that he is promptly press-ganged into the harsher Prussian service. We follow, but we remain detached, the narrative controlled on a long rein.

duct (which we don't really see). The feeble excuse that he has fallen into evil company sounds rather like the truth. When he is enlisted in the secret service of his Prussian masters and promptly reveals his identity to the man he has been set to spy on, the Irish Chevalier de Balibari (Patrick Magee), it's plausible that the farm boy a long way from home should break down in the presence of a fellow countryman. (Though Kubrick, perhaps distrusting Thackeray's cheerful coincidences, doesn't reveal that the raddled, patched and painted gambler is none other than old Uncle Barry of Barryogue.) The gambler, a substitute father (Barry, in these scenes, is subservient to almost everyone), educates him in the sly art of living on his wits. Previously, the film has been set mainly outdoors: in the green Irish meadows where the redcoats parade, on roads and heaths and in military en-

has to work very hard and very unpleasantly to net his heiress. In the film, the business is virtually done with an exchange of meaningful looks across the gaming table. Kubrick may simply have felt he wanted to move the film on at this point, or that to follow the novel would put too taxing a strain on the inexperienced Marisa Berenson. But it's worth speculating that he left this episode out because it's the one in which Barry makes something happen, positively if unforgivably, and in which the director would have to break through his own smooth surface to come to grips with the motives of a rogue. If Kubrick had included the courtship, he could hardly have handled as he does the duel with Lord Bullingdon (which is his addition to Thackeray). It is not that he necessarily makes Barry a nicer character, but that he leaves more possibilities open.



Gainsborough lady: Marisa Berenson as Lady Lyndon

Barry, for instance, is allowed a brief idyll with a German peasant girl (a very faint echo, one might think, of *La Grande Illusion*). But the incident—which is not in the novel—is austere adjusted by the annotation that she's equally available to any other passing soldier. The cutting away from episodes at or before the point of involvement, the lack of tension behind character, the absence even of much sense of danger, are the exact opposite of the opportunistic excitability and overkill of a film like *Royal Flash*, where Malcolm McDowell plays another braggart anti-hero, perhaps even somewhat closer to the original Barry, scuttling like a tensed-up rabbit through a warren of pastiche.

Barry is no roaring boy. He's a kind of adventurer by accident, and in army uniform he literally looks as though his clothes don't fit. In the Prussian service he's rewarded for bravery (which we see) and simultaneously reprimanded for bad con-

campments. Now Kubrick's stately progress through the eighteenth century closes in: to a hot, candlelit view (shot with specially developed ultra fast lenses by Zeiss) of powder and paint and Gainsborough faces sweating over the cards.

When the perspective opens out again, into the ordered delight of the English 18th century landscape, Barry has achieved the fortune-hunter's goal: marriage to a soft, silly woman with a great estate. Visually, the second half of the film throws off one deliberately painterly echo after another: Reynolds, Constable, Zoffany, Hogarth, even, in a shot of a dog and a boat, Stubbs. The setting is refined, stable and enormously self-confident; the people are mostly bored and mean-minded, extravagant and indolent. But, significantly, the hinge of the film, Barry's courtship of Lady Lyndon, which opens his door into this world, finds Kubrick parting company totally from Thackeray. In the novel, Barry

Pauline Kael's strange suggestion that 'If you were to cut the jokes and cheerfulness out of the film *Tom Jones* and run it in slow motion you'd have something very close to *Barry Lyndon*,' shows that if you begin in the tone of pastiche picaresque you may be expected to keep it up all the way. In fact, the second half of the film leaves movement and the rake's rambling progress behind; the landscape is grandly spacious, but within it the characters seem increasingly isolated and frozen. Barry finds himself playing a plump Claudius to his stepson's peevish, viperish little Hamlet, while Gertrude confers with her chaplain, the Reverend Runt (Murray Melvin), has fits of the vapours, and relaxes in the bath while a maid reads to her in French.

Kubrick has been accused of pointing the slight *Hamlet* parallel, but it's there in Thackeray and even, at one remove, in the source Thackeray drew on. Barry behaves badly to his wife, ruins the estate by sheer

inexperience and mismanagement, piles up debts while pursuing fatuous social and dynastic ambitions in a society he never gets the measure of, and plays heavy stepfather to the insolent little Bullingdon. He dotes on his own son, who meets much the same untimely end as the equally self-willed infant in *Gone With the Wind*—he's thrown from a horse, and precipitated into a death bed over which Kubrick lingers with pointed and unexpected sentiment. Once again, any real enormities on Barry's part are matters of narrative record; and when the camera moves in close on Lady Lyndon, driven to demented despair by ill treatment, her agonised writhings are hardly more affecting than those of the cat lady in *A Clockwork Orange*. Lady Lyndon is a faded, foolish presence, and perhaps Kubrick simply isn't enough interested in women to give her more independence of outline than the role of distraught mother and unloved wife strictly demands.

Instead, he has enlarged on the roles played by the egregious Runt and by the family steward, and the masked methods of narrative come into focus in one small scene. Barry has imported his mother, a true Irish harridan but possessed of a business acumen denied her son, who now finds herself virtually managing the estate. She calls in the Reverend Runt to sack him, both on grounds of retrenchment and of the unwholesome influence of canting religious prattle on her ladyship. The clergyman, a pallid little toad, snaps back that he's being removed as part of a plot to isolate the ailing Lady Lyndon from her friends. Is the old lady as malevolently scheming as the clergyman paints her; is she genuinely trying to remove a harmful pest from her daughter-in-law's entourage? In this and other scenes, Kubrick leaves the interpretation tantalisingly wide open, refusing to take us behind the scenes of motive, presenting private life, as it were, in public.

And, in the 18th century equation between sense and sensibility, 'sense' finally rests with those who know how to hold on to property (money and its management is the thread running through the film, as through so many 19th century novels) while 'sensibility' is one of the factors that bring down the outsider. Thackeray packs off Lord Bullingdon, after his first spirited defiance, to fight in the American war, and brings him back to enjoy his inheritance only when Barry is beaten. Kubrick keeps Bullingdon lurking, so that he can challenge Barry to the film's final duel. In one of the picture's most conscious set ups, Bullingdon tracks down his stepfather at his London club, so late at night that the porters are dozing in the hall, a cleaning woman is down on her knees with a scrubbing brush, and the group of friends around the table can be fittingly held in a Hogarthian pose, gamblers at the rag-end of the night.

As an avenger, however, Bullingdon is merely petulant, and in the duel scene he is shaking with panic, actually sick with fright. The punctiliousness of the exchanges ('Lord Bullingdon, are you ready to receive Mr. Lyndon's fire?'), the shadowy enclosed setting, drag out the private fight, like the moment before the advance in the battle scene. Bullingdon gets first shot, but his pistol misfires; Barry fires into the ground; and the quivering little lordling pulls

himself together enough to fire and fell his man. The extreme deliberation of this scene—which, it should be stressed, has no echo in the book—retrospectively suggests an explanation for Kubrick's rewriting of *Barry Lyndon*. Barry's devious career has been governed by the ambition to become a gentleman; and it's as a 'gentleman' that he holds off when he has his man at his mercy—in this one area, honour rules. Bullingdon, who has the advantage of having been born a gentleman, shows no such compunction.

Barry loses a leg as a result of the duel, is bought off by the family, and hobbles away in his old mother's charge; Kubrick ends his role on the hiatus of a frozen frame as the defeated reprobate takes to the road again. But there's still a final scene, which finds Lady Lyndon, her son, her chaplain and her steward seated round a table, her ladyship once again signing cheques. As Alexander Walker has pointed out, the date on the money order is 1789; the end, in effect, of the 18th century. Kubrick doesn't let the scene go quickly: he holds on to that tight little group, held in the act of paying off the past and protecting the future.

Thackeray's ending is crueller but more human—Barry in prison, still quarrelling with his mother. Kubrick's is chilly, dispassionate, too formal for easy irony. Little quarter has been given to Lady Lyndon and her son, who behave well neither as victims nor as victors. Barry is a kind of Gatsby without the dream—the



Barry at bay: encounter with the highwaymen.
Lady Lyndon and her chaplain (Murray Melvin)

seedy soldier of fortune who by the end wears all his scars. And I find myself perhaps rather perversely fascinated by the role of the Reverend Runt, a circumspect little sycophant, watchful, disapproving, impossible to dislodge, a representative of the hypocrisy of the age.

Andrew Sarris in his *Village Voice* review calls *Barry Lyndon* 'the most expensive meditation on melancholy ever financed by

a Hollywood studio,' and goes on to claim that 'every frame is a fresco of sadness.' This is an interesting, even appealing piece of critical overstatement, correctly suggesting not only how the second half of the film overshadows the first, but how Kubrick's insistent muting of mood, directing Barry's early adventures against what seem the natural or merely predictable energies of the material, imposes the tone which unites the only half-willed triumph of Redmond Barry and the only half-willed calamity of Barry Lyndon.

The theme is one for melancholy, by no means tragedy, and it can be argued that the characters caught in those magnificent 18th century settings (production design by Ken Adam, but locations everywhere), to the accompaniment of such gravely insistent music, are simply too minor to engage attention at the necessary level. But the necessary level in that case becomes partly one of expectation. Kubrick's special position as a film-maker is that he has acquired extraordinary authority, working within a system which expects a large return for a large outlay; and has done this not by the standard success method of delivering more of the same, but by having the will to surprise. In *Barry Lyndon* the surprise is partly that of withdrawal and abstraction, achieved through a classical technique which sustains its moral equilibrium while offering neither psychological justifications nor escapes into restful melodrama. (The escape element, of course, is that the film looks very beautiful.) To make *Barry Lyndon* work, the spectator has first to shed expectations about the genre, and the larkish energy associated with Tom Jones and his descendants; and then to achieve a series of adjustments between a setting which represents an age's finest view of itself, and the fatalistic melancholy of the human prospect.

Kubrick obviously keeps as close an eye on the advertising as on everything else connected with a picture, and it was slightly surprising that within a week of the London opening a sonorous quotation from *Time* had been joined in the press advertisements by chirpy chatter from *Vogue*, wondering whether Marisa Berenson might be the Garbo of the 1970s (not, unhappily, a question to conjure with) and recommending *Barry Lyndon* as holiday escape. I don't believe for a moment that Kubrick thinks he has made that sort of picture; but he has been quoted as saying that he hopes it will 'gross in nine figures'—in other words, join *Jaws* at over \$100 million—and to get anywhere near that optimistic target this introverted and almost secretive epic probably needs selling on the proposition that the past is a safer country, and a lot prettier as well.

Looking back on Kubrick's record, and assigning *Dr. Strangelove* to the future (or nightmare land) and *Lolita* to a world apart from time, it's disconcerting to realise that not since *The Killing*, now twenty years old, has he set a picture squarely in the age we live in. The past is safer in that it's controllable; and the fastidious control in *Barry Lyndon* seems as near total as the fallible mechanisms of film-making allow. It will be fascinating to see whether Kubrick ever again allows himself to be surprised in film-making by the uncontrollable—instead of surprising his audience. ■

BRITISH NATIONAL PICTURES LTD



British National Pictures' brochure of 1926, announcing their new studio

There is good reason to believe that if British producers were able to improve their position by widening their market, the banks would be ready to recognise the fact by giving them any reasonable financial assistance that might be required.

Indeed, quite recently a British bank gave a progressive British film producer financial assistance of a kind similar to that which American producers are accustomed to receive. This particular producing company, realising that something like 70 per cent of the world market is in America, decided to produce films which would be as acceptable to the American market as to the British. To this end they employed actors and actresses of established reputations, and spent exceptionally large sums in order to obtain a high-class and popular picture. So successfully have they produced their films that the company has been able to enter into a definite contract for the distribution of their first four pictures throughout the world with the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation, which is the largest distributing organisation of its kind. One of these pictures is called *London*, the purpose of

Fifty years apart, but the refrain is similar: if only the British could make films for the international market, then the British film industry could prosper. *The Times* extract relates to the completion by British National Pictures Limited in 1926 of new studios at Elstree, Hertfordshire (now owned by EMI). A publicity brochure of the time glows with pride that the first film to be made at Elstree will be *Madame Pompadour*, with Dorothy Gish as star. British National 'by private enterprise has accomplished at Elstree what it was considered a year ago could only be done with Government support.' Fifty years on and the call is, once again, for Government support.

The Prime Minister's working party was set up in August last year, following a dinner party held on May 13 at Downing Street, arranged after some of Mr. Wilson's friends in the industry had alerted him to the steep fall in investment in film production that had taken place in 1974 and that looked like continuing. Mr. Wilson has a sympathetic ear to the woes of the film industry. During his tenure as President of the Board of Trade (1947-51), the parlous state of the industry—then a far larger and more important lame duck than now—was a continuing problem. The measures taken while he was its ministering angel are generally agreed to have been constructive. There were a series of committees—including, yes, a 'working party'—and out of much public discussion there emerged the National Film Finance Corporation in 1948, designed to last for five years, and the Eady Levy in 1950, originally scheduled to exist for a single year. Mr. Wilson, the NFFC, the Eady Levy and the problems of the industry are still with us.

Chaired by the NFFC's managing director, John Terry, the 1975 working party consisted of Richard Attenborough, Lord Brabourne (producer of *Murder on the Orient Express*), Michael Deeley (producer, managing director of British Lion), Sir Bernard Delfont (EMI), Carl Foreman (producer, who was unable to attend any meetings owing to his absence in Hollywood), Sir John Woolf (producer), Alan Sapper for the unions, Hugh Orr for the exhibitors, A. W. Mallinson (chairman of the Government's advisory body, the Cinematograph Films Council, whose 1974 report to the Government on the state of the industry clearly made but small impact), Alasdair Milne defending the interests of the BBC and Brian Tesler doing the same for the commercial television companies, Lord Ryder, without whom no working party is nowadays complete, and Lady Falkender, who is the Prime Minister's personal political secretary and a fair judge of what is practical politics.

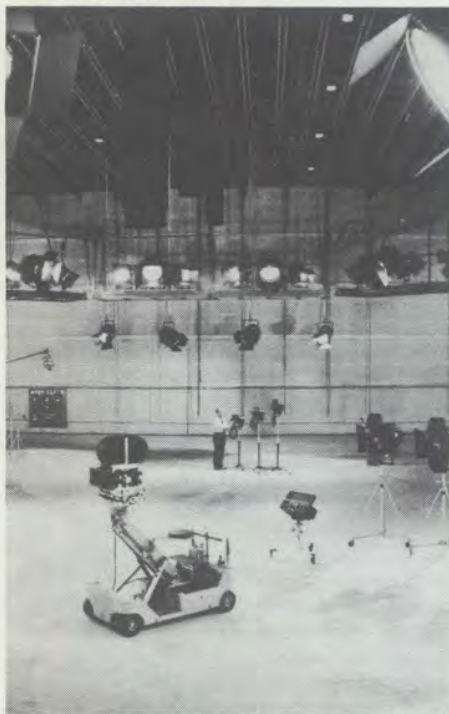
The report was delivered to the Prime Minister two days before Christmas and published on January 14. Civil servants were told to review the proposals speedily. This is not an easy matter since the report is as short on diagnosis and analysis as it is long in recommendations. There are 39, and they tend to spring from the page with great assertiveness but little reasoning. This is hardly surprising since the terms of reference for the working party—'to consider the requirements of a viable and prosperous British film industry over the next decade'—beg two pretty big questions:

BRITISH NATIONAL PICTURES RIDES AGAIN

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David Gordon

Pinewood, equipped for films and TV



which is obvious. No other British producing company has been able to make a contract with the Famous Players Corporation for the world distribution of its products, and the secret of this noteworthy success is to be found in the abandonment of the old practice of producing at limited cost a film only suitable for the limited home market... The success of the company to which we have referred indicates that if British producers would make pictures of a standard hitherto undreamt of in this country, and ensure distribution in world markets, the financial difficulty would disappear.

—*The Times*, September 8, 1926

The international market for films is a growing one, provided that films of sufficient appeal, commensurate with their cost, can be made... Financing partnerships between the British and US investors are generally unfavourable to the British investor unless he has the financial strength to make an equitable deal.

—*Report of the Prime Minister's Working Party*, January, 1976

(1) why is the British film industry not viable and prosperous now and (2) why should it be?

The report kicks off with an assertion (disguised as Recommendation One) that total investment in British film production should be increased to £40m a year, described as 'the minimum scale of new British finance required to support a prosperous industry.' How does that compare with the level of production now? There are no investment figures—the report sensibly recommends that film statistics be improved—but the report estimates a present level of £25m a year, of which about £16m is American money. Thus the report is recommending an increase in investment of 60 per cent, which sounds a little steep. Where will the money come from? Can it be profitably invested?

The implicit—but never explicit—answer to the second question seems to be No, and as a result a curious begging bowl is pushed out. Since 'the private sector cannot be expected to carry the weight of the new financial resources required,' the Government should put £5m of 'equity' (a presentational euphemism for interest-free grant) into a fund which would have the right to call on an additional £5m in the second, third and fourth years of operation. Does that make a £20m fund? At the press conference to launch the report, this was fudged; after all, in these times of financial stringency Wardour Street hardly likes to be seeking such a big sum. The fund would be supplemented by taking £1m a year out of the Eady Levy, and this annual infusion would more than soak up any losses made by the fund. The £5m-a-year equity fund 'would, if wisely handled' generate a further £10m a year, and fill the gap between the £40m the working party wants and the £25m actually being invested.

To coat the pill with more sugar, another presentational device is used. It is suggested that the money for the equity fund should be taken out of the excess profits tax paid by the commercial television companies, currently about £21m a year. There is a certain rough justice in deriving some money out of television for one of its victims. But the Treasury regards the excess profits tax as just another source of money to pay the Government's bills: £5m less from this tax means finding £5m from somewhere else. And if the television tax is to pay for this victim, what about the others—like the soccer clubs whose terraces are empty because the fans of yesteryear are watching *Grandstand*?

The working party was specifically charged to explore 'the desirability of a closer integration between the cinematograph and television industries.' It must have been hard for the working party to be unanimous about this, since different parts of the film industry have been affected by television in different ways. The unions: apart from the unfortunate production workers in the dying or dead studios, freelance technicians can work quite happily in either film or television, which is why the figures trotted out by the union on how many of their 'film' workers are unemployed are suspect. The producers: once the film is made, they want it to reach the largest paying audience possible; in the United States, films are

bought at a high price by television when they are still relatively new, so producers are not fussy about where their films are seen. The distributors: financially, they want to be able to sell films to British television when they are newer so as to get more money, but emotionally their hearts are in the cinemas. The exhibitors: they believe that it is television that has reduced the number of cinemas by two-thirds in the last thirty years, and say that this is because films are shown on television; thus they want fewer and older films on the box so that people have to go to the local cinema to see new ones.

Perhaps because there was only a lone exhibitor on the working party, the anti-television voice was muted. The report recommends that the industry's voluntary ban on selling films to television until five years after they have been released should be dropped—in favour of a statutory three-year ban. Less protection in time, but more in law; under recent restrictive practices legislation the film industry will ultimately have to prove in court that its ban operates in the public interest. That will not be easy. Cinemas will have to spruce up to attract their audiences. The report sensibly proposes that a tenth of the equity fund be used to help cinemas modernise and convert into twins and triples; a process that has at last slowed down the decline in attendances.

Since films made for cinemas prove so popular on television, it is in the interest of television to ensure that the supply is maintained. In the United States, the television companies have to compete amongst themselves to buy films and the prices are high. In Britain there is no competition. The film buyer at the BBC knows the seller has only got one other place to go—and vice versa. The Films Council tried to get television to pay a levy on the films; but failed. So at the very least television should invest in film-making. And this is what the report recommends. The BBC has said in the recent past that it is prepared to put £25,000 seed money into each of ten projects a year, and to pay another £25,000 for a showing on television once its investment has been recovered.

For the commercial television companies, a rather ingenious proposal. That the 'relevant expenditure' that can be deducted from advertising revenue to form the basis for the excess profits tax should be defined more broadly so as to include investment in feature films. A television company's advertising revenue will not go up appreciably because it spends £11m on programmes rather than £10m. But an extra £1m invested in films can be expected to make some extra cash at the cinema box-office. And two-thirds of this £1m would otherwise disappear as tax.

Sir Lew Grade, head of Associated Television, has already committed his company to films in a very big way. Together with partners responsible for half the financial commitment, he is planning a \$100m programme of films (for comparison, 20th Century-Fox is planning \$70m this year, and that is more than most). Now if Sir Lew is going ahead without the benefit of relief from the excess profits tax, why don't the other television companies—and why not the film companies whose balance sheets

are even more powerful than his, like EMI and the Rank Organisation?

Partly, Britain's film companies have given up the fight because they accept that the American major distributors are unbeatable in the English-speaking world. Universal, Paramount and the others share a domestic rental market of £250m and get another £250m abroad. Thus with an annual income of £500m they can afford the big budget movies that are now, after a brief respite, back in vogue again. More important, they can afford the flops that are an inevitable part of film financing. EMI has been bitten so often in the past that its desire to take risks has been curbed—and Rank's is almost completely dead. Sir Lew is a relative newcomer in the industry, and many fear that he too will get his head bitten off.

If he succeeds, it will be because he can get good deals from the American distributors, because in the last resort he is prepared to finance his films without them. That is the only good argument for an equity film fund—as good as when British National used it. British film producers backed with British money would be able to get better terms for distribution and profit-sharing in the United States than if they have to ask the distributors for finance to make the films in the first place. But if this is such a good argument, why don't EMI and Rank use it on themselves? The other part of the answer is that their film production management is lacking in vision and dynamism. EMI's Sir Nat Cohen has but rarely joined the world league of producers. Rank does not even have anyone in the British league.

And where will the management for the new film fund come from? The National Film Finance Corporation hardly provides a precedent for dynamism. The report recommends a new body, with the rather unlibertarian name of the British Film Authority, to run the equity fund and NFFC, and also to take over the bureaucratic and administrative responsibilities for film at present shared among the Departments of Trade and Education and Science, and be responsible for the National Film School and the British Film Institute; the Films Council would be killed off.

No thought was given as to how the Authority should fit into the broader picture of the administration of the arts. The Authority should be responsible to a Minister for the Arts. But film is part art and part industry. Such sensible proposals as quality awards for films of artistic merit, and the statutory deposit of prints of films with the National Film Archive, fit into the art category. But part of film is concerned with negotiation with foreign powers (e.g. co-production agreements), which is best done at the Department of Trade. Part would be the doling out of money to commercial enterprises, which is what the Department of Industry does. And since the BFI is also, according to its articles of association, concerned with television, why should it come under the Film Authority when the Authority is not going to come under a broadcasting umbrella? The working party hoped that an animal with lots of spots could turn out to be a leopard. It seems more likely to be a spotty camel. ■

In The Picture

Picnic Under Capricorn

'Australian books tend to concentrate on the idea of being an Australian, on fitting into your environment, on what the country means to you, on the crisis of European man trying to fit into an alien environment at the bottom of the world . . . And these things have never interested me at all.'

The speaker is Peter Weir, at 31 a veteran of the former Commonwealth Film Unit who is currently being hailed as the white hope of the nascent Australian film industry. Although his first feature, *The Cars That Ate Paris*, enjoyed a modest critical success in Europe, it was greeted at home with a mixture of critical hostility and public indifference. 'Curiously, it wasn't attacked for putting across an unflattering image of Australia: I sensed that some of the film's detractors would have liked it to be more vicious . . . They objected to it essentially on the grounds that it belonged to no genre. They found it impure, jumbled, confused. They couldn't see that perhaps the film was operating inside its own category.' At any rate, *Cars* sank without trace shortly after its Australian release, and has yet to recover its costs—a meagre \$(Aus.) 200,000.

It is Weir's second feature, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, that is causing the excitement. Not only has it been eulogised by the Australian press (the more surprising since, like *Cars*, it belongs to no established category of film); it has also joined *Alvin Purple* and *Barry Mackenzie* in recovering its production and promotion costs (around a half-million dollars) in the home market alone, and is still running in the capital cities. The film has been particularly acclaimed for its lyrical photography (by Russell Boyd), and there's speculation that it will win Australia a place in the main competition at Cannes.

Picnic at Hanging Rock is adapted from a 1967 novel by Joan Lindsay. Written in her mid-sixties and her only work of fiction, it has provoked the belief that it's based on a true, but undocumented, incident. The subject has rapidly worked its way into the national folklore, and the mystery sur-

rounding the mystery has lent valuable support to the film's publicity campaign.

'On St. Valentine's Day in 1900 a party of schoolgirls went on a picnic to Hanging Rock. Some were never to return . . .' That much the advertisements reveal. The school in question is run by the widowed Mrs. Appleyard, a Bournemouth expatriate, iron-corseted and iron-gloved; the Hanging Rock is an extraordinary volcanic formation on the slopes of Mount Macedon, on the edge of the Victorian bush; and the missing persons are a mathematics teacher and two girls, who disappear without trace during a picnic. (A third girl is found a week later, but remembers nothing.) Rumours of rape, murder, abduction persist, despite a baffling lack of evidence. Suspicion lingers briefly on the visiting young Englishman (Dominic Guard) who was the last to glimpse the girls alive. No explanation is ever found, but the tragedy continues to affect its peripheral characters, materially and spiritually, for the rest of their natural lifetimes. The school goes into a financial decline; the staff leave or meet violent deaths; one pupil commits suicide. The Englishman remains faithful to the memory of a girl (Anne Lambert) glimpsed on the Rock . . .

I asked Peter Weir if he'd been hesitant about filming a mystery without a solution. 'My only worry was whether an audience would accept such an outrageous idea. Personally, I always found it the most satisfying and fascinating aspect of the film. I usually find endings disappointing: they're totally unnatural. You are creating life on the screen, and life doesn't have endings. It's always moving on to something else and there are always unexplained elements.'

'What I attempted, somewhere towards the middle of the film, was gently to shift emphasis off the mystery element which had been building in the first half and to develop the oppressive atmosphere of something which has no solution: to bring out a tension and claustrophobia in the locations and the relationships. We worked very hard at creating an hallucinatory, mesmeric rhythm, so that you lost awareness of facts, you stopped

adding things up, and got into this enclosed atmosphere. I did everything in my power to hypnotise the audience away from the possibility of solutions . . . There are, after all, things within our own minds about which we know far less than about disappearances at Hanging Rock. And it's within a lot of the silences that I tell my side of the story.'

Weir freely admits that he's always been more interested in atmosphere than character, and insists that he works from instinct rather than 'premeditation'. But his instinct prompted him, and his scriptwriter Cliff Green, to at least one premeditated shift of emphasis. Although Joan Lindsay's novel contains hints of the Rock as another time zone, its style combines the omniscient condensation of an Agatha Christie (characters neatly slotted into defined social stations and good-humoured servants kept above suspicion) with a streak of purple pantheism. She stresses the repressiveness of Victorian morality and 'the smouldering passions banked down under the weight of grey disciplines.' Weir's school contains more lyrical sunlight than lurking shadows—its atmosphere perhaps further lightened when illness prevented Vivien Merchant filling the role of the headmistress, now played by Rachel Roberts—and he emphasises instead the book's timeless theme: 'The tragedy had its beginnings on St. Valentine's Day. Traditionally, it's the day of the pairing of birds. And from the moment the day begins, the story is about the failure of birds to

pair and of connections to be made.'

'I could have placed more emphasis on the outpost of Empire in the bush, the invaders in an alien landscape, the repressive nature of this little piece of Empire; but as the atmosphere resulting from the disappearances became my central interest, these themes disappeared from view . . . Yes, you could see them as elements in all my films,' (including *Homesdale*, an experimental 50-minutes about a lethal holiday camp for jaded city folk) 'though I'm only conscious of one recurring theme. I find people in isolated situations fascinating. Obvious things—long boat voyages and waiting rooms and lifts—unfailingly intrigue me because people reveal . . . all the things that aren't being said. Not so much in their relationships as in their unconscious. And I like situations where I can get these things out quickly. Nature isn't consciously a theme with me either. It's just that, in the most practical way, I prefer to make films away from the city. It's not that the wide open spaces open me up but that I find them intensely claustrophobic.'

'My next film? I think it's jinxed to talk about it . . . I'm working on a screenplay. A contemporary story about a man who believes pre-Incan craft landed in this country around the sixth century. He goes further than that. He believes they built a city here, which he's determined to find. And . . . Respectful of the jinx, the tape obligingly runs out.'

JAN DAWSON

'Picnic at Hanging Rock': school group



Polanski as Actor

Restless while waiting for the construction of the huge sets necessary for *Pirates* (a big-budget 'homage-parody of the swashbuckling epics'), Roman Polanski read Roland Topor's *Le Locataire Chimérique*, a novel about a timid filing clerk who is either paranoid or the victim of a real plot against him by his neighbours in a rundown Parisian apartment house. Within six weeks, Polanski had completed a script based on the book in collaboration with Gérard Brach, had set up the production of *The Tenant* in Paris with Andrew Braunsberg and Marianne Productions, and had decided to direct himself as actor in the principal role.

Keeping up this brisk pace, Polanski completed the exterior work in five weeks all over Paris—from the Jardin des Tuileries and Les Halles to dingy cinemas (Le Concordia) and cafés (Le Nebraska)—while the interior sets were being built at Studio d'Epinay in suburban Paris. The huge set, the entire apartment house where the action takes place, was designed by Pierre Guffroy (Buñuel's art director on *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* and *The Phantom of Liberty*) and is perfect in its verisimilitude down to discarded Gauloise Bleu butts in the courtyard and uniquely Parisian calcium stains in the sinks. It includes several full apartments and a slovenly concierge's *loge* from which Shelley Winters will grouchy spy on the strange behaviour of the tenants and their friends (or co-conspirators), an international group including Isabelle Adjani (Truffaut's *Adèle H.*, who is also to have a major role in *Pirates*), Bernard Fresson, Lila Kedrova, Claude Dauphin, Claude Pieplu,

and Melvyn Douglas, as well as Polanski himself.

Everything, according to Polanski, is 'going very smoothly.' Between takes, he talked about directing himself as an actor: 'On the whole, this role turns out to be less difficult for me than the one in *Dance of the Vampires*. It's one way of getting rid of an intermediary, and it makes one less person to argue with on the set. I'm not a megalomaniac, but I am inspired by the examples of Chaplin, Lloyd, Keaton, Welles... Why shouldn't I be my own actor?' Certainly everything seemed to be going smoothly enough, and the whole process seemed less complicated than might be imagined, especially considering that the film is being shot in English, a language which a fair number of the cast do not speak.

The system works something like this: Polanski and cinematographer Sven Nykvist discuss the shots they will need and the best way to get them. Polanski looks through the camera to make sure he sees what he wants. A rehearsal or two follows, with a rather short young Rumanian dancer standing in for Polanski. The cast rehearse in their native languages, and then everyone is excused for a few minutes while they prepare to shoot the dialogue in English (except for a few less dramatic, faster scenes which are shot in French to be dubbed into English later). This process has its more amusing aspects; for example, Bernard Fresson off in a corner repeating his line 'Who is this ass-hole?' over and over with the accent falling on a different syllable each time. While up to fifteen takes are not unknown, Polanski has so carefully prepared everything that as few as four—or even single—takes are more the rule. After each

day's shooting, the production team watch the previous day's rushes while Polanski tells editor Françoise Bonnot what he wants her to do, for the editing is being done even as shooting continues.

If there are indeed 'arguments on the set', there were no signs of them the day I visited the shooting. The countless small adjustments to the props, the minor manipulations of a performance (Polanski showing a young actress *exactly* how he wanted her to turn at a knock on the door), and the decisions on camera placement ('Sven, here I want a long, long tracking') all went efficiently and were carried out with good humour and many jokes in several languages.

Nor does Polanski's allusion to Chaplin, Lloyd and Keaton seem odd after watching a party sequence being shot (the climax of which is Fresson's urinating in a sink—a 'poire' filled with beer is his main prop here—and the sudden knock at the door of a sinisterly pale neighbour complaining in a macabre way about the party noise). From his position behind the camera, even Polanski was laughing at lines he had already heard several times (and which, after all, he had himself written). As for the allusion to Welles, for all the script's comedy—which is tolerably black anyway—the thriller does examine some fairly dark places in the human soul. Paranoia, a car 'accident', and two suicides, as well as the final shocking scene which I was asked not to describe, have more in common with the Polanski of *Repulsion* than of *What?*. There is already a strong rumour that the film will be one of this year's official French entries at Cannes.

DAVID L. OVERBEY

whole family. 115-year-old granddad, his three grandsons and, of course, the remains of grandma inhabit the white house where they systematically butcher passing travellers and recycle them as sausage-meat. The action of the film shows five young people stumbling upon this gruesome ménage. One by one they are ferociously attacked—smashed down with hammers, hewn apart with a chainsaw or impaled on hooks like cadavers in a slaughterhouse.

The film differs from most such exercises in making no explicit attempt to offer explanations for the behaviour of the killers beyond simple bloodlust. Hooper has commented that 'it's a film about meat, about people who are gone beyond dealing with animal meat and rats and dogs and cats. Crazy, retarded people going beyond the line between animal and human.'

In his festival programme notes Alexander Walker outlined his reasons for urging the film's presentation. He emphasised how the film's handling of mass murder 'does not attempt to interpret or distance it aesthetically.' More tentatively, he argued that the film 'helps define a certain aspect of society today... It belongs to the *Old Dark House* genre, quite clearly, and its director, Tobe Hooper, has neither interest nor encouragement in stepping outside the genre and looking at the society which produced such events. Yet the rest of society does come up to the door of the "Old Dark House", like the unwary victims in the film.'

Personally I was more inclined to go along with Derek Malcolm's opinion that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is essentially an effective exploitation piece; grand guignol horror with few pretensions. Analysis of the film too quickly throws up contradictions and confusions. In the grand tradition of many such exercises in the macabre, the film is ultimately neither disturbing nor provoking. Not only is society absolved from any 'blame' for the violence, but it is indicated that all the events were preordained anyway (the stars had forecast them), while the film's resolution is safe and complacent: the villains are bound to be caught, while the final victim has made a classic last-moment, with-one-bound-she-was-free escape. Further, while Walker correctly notes the avoidance of any distancing techniques, he might also have pointed out the limited encouragement of identification or involvement with the innocents, who remain sketchy and uncharacterised. The viewer is neither so detached as to find himself also seeing the dead as so many carcasses (which would have been disturbing on a more profound level), nor so drawn into the action as to feel truly terrified.

If the film cannot be singled out for its artistic brilliance or the subtlety of its social message, it remains a phenomenon of some interest—a 16mm quickie that

'The Texas Chainsaw Massacre'



Family Life

The London Film Festival, unlike many others, has never had a Critics' section. Last year, however, one film appeared under the heading 'Critics' Choice', its showing accompanied by the presence of three of those who had asked for its inclusion. Alexander Walker, Derek Malcolm and Nigel Andrews led a discussion in which it emerged, rather curiously, that the picture had been chosen as much to challenge the Board of Film Censors' decision to ban the film as for its own intrinsic merit.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre was inspired by an incident in Wisconsin in 1957 when a man was arrested following the discovery in his house of dismembered bodies and disinterred corpses. A grave-robbler, he also lured young girls into his home where he murdered and cannibalised them, using their remains as household ornaments. Among the bodies was that of his mother, a detail upon which Hitchcock's *Psycho* was based.

Director/writer/producer Tobe Hooper has not only updated his film to 1973, he has also transformed the lone maniac into a

was made for £75,000 and has grossed millions. Whether this is sufficient reason to afford *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* such special treatment is questionable. Other films of greater import have passed out of circulation with little attention focused on them. The name of Charles Manson naturally cropped up a number of times during the Festival discussion. A documentary entitled *Manson* has been in this country for two years. It deals with Manson's followers after his trial and imprisonment, showing their total lack of remorse and their continued faith in their leader. With little explicit sex or violence, it is more chilling than any picture adopting the blood and thunder approach. Yet a film that *The Times* called 'a documentary of scrupulous objectivity and a social document of some importance,' remains not only unseen but largely unlamented.

Oddly enough, its peaceful demise can probably be attributed in part to the fact that *Manson* has not been turned down by the censoring bodies, for the GLC, in the days before its liberal policies and power were challenged, awarded it a certificate. In such cases, with no censorship angle, there is a tendency to dismiss the issue as one of doubtful news value.

Of course it is easy to appreciate the dilemma of the critics, themselves an integral part of the film world. No doubt they are all only too aware of the limitations that the very structure of the industry imposes on the circulation of 'product', and it is easy enough to identify films that were actually saved from oblivion by the critics. But for every *Kes* or *Duel*, pages of copy are devoted to the relatively insignificant activities of the censors. It does seem that there is some disinclination to face up to the fact that it is commerce rather than censorship that exerts the real grip on freedom of expression in the cinema. If one has argued that the anti-permissive lobby has missed the point in attacking the media and its controllers for the ills of society, it is equally true that liberal commentators have also tended to concentrate on an easy and vulnerable target rather than grapple with more crucial problems.

GUY PHELPS

The Birth of a Nation

Last August, a U.S. appeals court declared the copyright renewal on D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* invalid, thereby seemingly placing the film in the public domain, at least as far as the United States is concerned. Most papers reported the decision, but without going beyond a summary of the facts in the case. American motion picture copyright law is a fairly dry subject, devoid for the most part of human interest angles. But the personalities involved in this case transform it into a drama in which the actions of the present contestants for ownership have their roots in



'The Tenant': Isabelle Adjani, Roman Polanski

the past. Though neither Epoch Producing Corporation (i.e. Raymond Rohauer and Jay Ward Productions Inc.) nor Paul Killiam (representing the Griffith Estate) had anything to do with the original production, each traced rights back to the film's original producers, becoming surrogates for men long dead or for men, as in the case of Roy Aitken (the only surviving producer of the film) who had yielded their rights to others.

The present claimants obtained their rights through quitclaims, documents that transfer title of ownership from one person to another. Killiam purchased a quitclaim to the Griffith Estate at an auction in 1959. Rohauer obtained a quitclaim to the heirs of author Thomas Dixon (on whose novel *The Clansman* the film was based) in 1964, sued Epoch for Dixon's back royalties and, as Jay Ward's agent, settled out of court with the owner of Epoch (Roy Aitken), securing control of Epoch for Ward.

The drama behind the facts is essentially a whodunnit. Ownership of the film, at one juncture in the lengthy trial, became a question of authorship. Epoch, on its 1942 copyright renewal, claimed that Thomas Dixon was the author; Killiam contended that D. W. Griffith was. The case, if its final outcome had turned upon this question of authorship, could have become one of the most celebrated in motion picture history, transforming the *auteur* theory into a legal tool for the determination of owner-authorship.

Killiam revealed a flair for showmanship, getting court testimony from Lillian Gish and Joseph Henaberry (who played Lincoln and other parts in the film) in support of Griffith's authorship. He even submitted as evidence frame enlargements of

inter-title cards from the film, inscribed, as all Griffith productions were, with the director's signature. (What greater proof of authorship could there be than the artist's signature on the work?) Killiam even arranged for Andrew Sarris, American exponent of the *auteur* theory, to testify, but Sarris couldn't make it. Killiam's theatrical sense of court-room procedure would surely have pleased Griffith, but it did little to influence the jury, who, wading through a tangle of copyright law, finally sustained Epoch's claim to the film.

It is at this point that the case changes direction and really becomes fascinating—for those interested in the labyrinthine workings of copyright law. Killiam hired a couple of young Washington lawyers to appeal the decision. They convinced him to drop his ownership claim and to attack the validity of Epoch's renewal, arguing that the film's rights had lapsed in 1942 and that Killiam had not therefore infringed on Epoch's rights in exploiting the film. Of course, if he won, Killiam would not have exclusive control of the film, but he would be free to exploit it along with anyone else who chose to do so. His chief advantage would be his printing material—his initial investment in the Griffith Estate had secured him ownership of the best prints of the film currently available.

Killiam's lawyers bolstered the Griffith authorship claim with legal facts (rather than celebrity testimony), building a new case out of evidence presented in the original trial. In appealing the lower court decision, Killiam pointed out inaccuracies in Epoch's copyright renewal. *The Birth* had originally been copyrighted, on February 8, 1915, by the David W. Griffith Corporation. Griffith later assigned his rights to Epoch. Epoch's renewal did not indicate

this transfer or the initial copyright holder.

Griffith's initial copyright listed himself and Frank E. Woods as 'authors of the photoplay', citing *The Clansman* as a source. Epoch's renewal listed itself as 'author of renewable material.' Epoch justified its renewal as 'proprietor of copyright in a work made for hire.' They claimed, in other words, that Griffith was not the film's author but merely an employee, working for hire. Killiam's lawyers scored a major point by proving that Epoch could not have been Griffith's employer because the company did not even exist at the time when *The Birth of a Nation* was made (it was incorporated later to distribute the film).

Apparently, even though Griffith transferred his rights to Epoch, his assignment of rights applied only for the first 28-year copyright term. After that, the film's rights returned to him. Griffith, who lived until 1948, could have renewed the copyright in 1942, but he didn't—perhaps because he didn't know he still had rights to it. His business sense was never very sharp. Griffith similarly failed to renew his copyrights to *Intolerance*, *Way Down East* and at least half-a-dozen post-1916 pictures.

Epoch's claim of ownership does have some financial justification. Harry and Roy Aitken, owners of Majestic Motion Picture Company, which became Epoch, contributed \$59,000 towards the film's production. Griffith himself raised another \$50,000. (He even made a deal with a Los Angeles wardrobe rental outfit to supply the film's costumes in exchange for stock.) The film's unique financing is reflected in the subsequent structure of Epoch, which issued stock to all the film's financial backers. Neither Griffith nor the Aitkens lost out financially,



Theodor Angelopoulos in London to receive the BFI Award

recouping their investments many times over. *Variety* reports that the film has grossed as much as \$50 million over the years.

The conflict between the film's legal and financial history seems justly resolved by the recent court decision, though resolution of that conflict was not the court's intention: Griffith's authorship (reflected in the initial copyright by his corporation) has invalidated Epoch's renewal. The film properly belongs to the public for whom Griffith made and from whom Epoch reaped a fortune.

The 'employee for hire' issue attracted the attention of the film industry. Columbia, MGM, Paramount, Fox, United Artists and Universal filed an *Amicus Curiae* brief, siding with Epoch. They apparently feared that their renewals, as proprietors of copyright in films made for hire, could be challenged if Killiam won his appeal. But, as yet, there has been no indication that Killiam's victory has affected the industry.

The Birth of a Nation case establishes no new precedent in motion picture law: those who provide the money still own the film, not those whose talents went into the creation of it. The only new law that the case establishes seems rather obvious: copyright renewals are not evidence of the validity of their contents. In other words, the facts listed on renewals can be challenged in court.

The new copyright law at present under consideration by the U.S. Congress eliminates the fascinating kinds of problems that this case reveals in. This new law eliminates renewal terms. An author's protection will last for fifty years after his death; a work made for hire will be protected for seventy-five years from the date of its publication. The chief problem with the new law is its delay in the Congress—it has been in the works since 1962. Meanwhile, renewal terms have been extended

by either one or two years nine times. It is ironic that *The Birth of a Nation*, if properly renewed and without Congress' renewal extensions, would have fallen into the public domain in 1971, making the Killiam-Epoch case unnecessary.

It is even more ironic that the film itself, which until recent years *Variety* acknowledged as the top all-time money-maker, now has little commercial value because of its controversial subject-matter. It is fitting that the battle for control of the film has concluded without victory—though Killiam clearly won a moral victory over Epoch. The final irony in the case is that the film now belongs to an American public which neither wants it nor knows what to do with it.

JOHN BELTON

BFI Award 1975

The British Film Institute Award for 1975 has been made to Theodor Angelopoulos' *The Travelling Players* (*O Thiasos*), shown at the London Festival and reviewed in the last issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*. This marathon history lesson (Greece from Metaxas through occupation and civil war to Papagos) is structured round the efforts of a group of actors to stage a play. They never finish a performance since reality, in the shape of present history, keeps intruding on drama. The theatrical artifice operates on several levels, constantly changing the perspective and setting up a series of oppositions between the actors and the events which, willingly or not, involve them at every turn. At the centre is the opposition between active involvement and passive acquiescence: a reverberating metaphor for more recent events in Greek history.

Born in Athens in 1936, Angelopoulos spent a year studying film

at IDHEC before returning to Greece as film critic of a Greek daily, one of the newspapers suppressed when the colonels came to power in 1967. He made *Reconstruction* in 1970 and *Days of 36* in 1972 (both shown at previous London Festivals). Astonishingly, *The Travelling Players* was partly shot during the last months of the junta's regime. But not exactly in secret. Local authorities (the film was shot in several regions of Greece) were only too happy to co-operate, Angelopoulos says, when they saw some of the early scenes being shot. This is more fascist than us, said one local mayor approvingly as he watched the film's reconstruction of the Metaxas dictatorship. The theatrical framework also provided some cover. Not surprisingly, perhaps, *The Travelling Players* has been an outstanding success in a Greece anxious to come to terms with the immediate past. Good news that it has now been acquired for British distribution.

Coupled with the main award is a special mention to *Winstanley*, Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo's film about the Diggers' movement in Cromwell's England (see *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Autumn 1975). Brownlow and Mollo's struggle to make the film, eventually backed by the BFI Production Board when everybody else had turned them down, has been almost matched by their efforts to get it distributed. It has now been taken by the Other Cinema; also good news.

Writer for Altman

Joan Tewkesbury, whose career as a screenwriter has flourished under the auspices of Robert Altman, recently broke off her association with her mentor, at least for the time being. She was to have adapted E. L. Doctorow's novel *Ragtime* for Altman. But he was under time pressure on the project, and Tewkesbury was committed to putting together a complete script for the paperback edition of *Nashville*. So a mutual decision was made to assign the project to another writer. 'I hope Doctorow himself gets to do it,' says Tewkesbury.

Joan Tewkesbury began her career with Altman by simply going into his office one day and saying, 'I think I can be of some use in this travelling band of thieves that you have.' Her background had been in theatre and dance. 'To me, Altman was the most exciting thing I'd seen since Jerome Robbins,' she recollects. 'I loved the way he used space and the way his actors were affected by their environment.' Altman took her up on her offer, and asked her to hold script for him on *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*. The experience was a lesson in screenwriting: 'I learned what you did not need. When you look at a film script and see all those notes about zooming in and zooming out, the camera seems like the most important part. But it isn't.

It seems to me that you need to know what transpires in the space between people, so you might have a vague clue about what was going to happen on screen. When I write a script, I write it for someone who is not a pro. They're more like novels.'

She also became convinced that Altman's improvisatory style could benefit from having someone who could provide him with an overall structure for the actors to work in. 'Warren Beatty and Julie Christie would go home at night and write their scenes, and then they would sit down with Altman and rewrite. And Altman and I would sit down and write stuff. He would dictate, and if I laughed he would leave that in. It was a real potpourri style. Then I thought, well, wouldn't it be easier if he had a construct. At least the actors wouldn't be home every night doing homework.'

Her next assignment from Altman was to adapt Edward Anderson's novel *Thieves Like Us*. In the interim, he filmed *The Long Goodbye*, in which the budding screenwriter was given the dubious distinction of having a nasty real-estate saleswoman named after her. She doesn't always see eye to eye with Altman on his use of such in-group material. 'You can step outside the picture and go "Oh, that again," but it's in another dimension. I think a film should keep the rhythm going in the same dimension, so that you don't lose the momentum of the story.' Joan Tewkesbury also differs from Altman about the use of the *Romeo and Juliet* broadcast as background to the love scene in *Thieves Like Us*. 'I guess you could say the radio was over-used, but it's the director's choice. I can think, "How about just once?" and if his idea is three times, it will be three times. There's no use getting really upset about it.'

'I don't feel my material is precious—ever,' she says firmly. 'Film is a collaborative form, and if you think of it any other way you're going to break your heart. The thing you learn by working with someone like Altman is that

Joan Tewkesbury



every input can be positive.' She adds, 'It's never pure improvisation anyway. Usually the actors and I talk for three or four days before shooting begins. Barbara Baxley wrote reams of material for her character in *Nashville*, which I edited. Then at the time of shooting there are new ideas or new ways to go and we all talk about that.'

All the same, she believes that the final work does have an overall thematic unity. 'Nashville keeps going no matter what,' she says. 'All the characters are trying desperately to get their act together on every level. Every taxi driver in Nashville, everybody who sells lingerie, says, "Listen, I've got this great song..." In *Nashville* there is a force pulling it together—you. I think that what audiences weren't used to is being responsible for their own opinion.'

One of the most powerful scenes in *Nashville*, and one of her own favourites, was the one in which Gwen Welles is manipulated into performing a striptease. She fought hard to keep it in the finished film, defending it against critics like the actor Ned Beatty, who felt it wasn't realistic. In other cases, however, her sensibility was subordinated to Altman's. He added eight characters and a political emphasis ('When I turned the script in, Watergate broke and Altman wanted a political line'); he also took a somewhat different approach to the characters. 'My tendency is to go down very far; Altman likes to stay up there on the surface. In my *Nashville* script for publication, I have included all the background material on the characters—information that was not in the film. I want to give readers a fuller understanding of what makes these people tick.'

Tewkesbury hasn't lost her enthusiasm about the Altman approach. 'The ease with which everything moves when he's around really appeals to me. His attitude about actors is that he really cares: they're the crux of his films. He knows who to cast against whom, who won't get on together and who will fall in love on a movie set. He will pit certain behaviours against others, and his casting is superb because it's never expected. Henry Gibson as Haven Hamilton is absolutely absurd.'

As a fully fledged member of the Altman clan, she is committed to the concept of interaction between director, writer and actor. Now that she is moving out on her own, she plans to use these skills in developing her own material. One of the projects she's currently working on is tentatively titled *Underground Railway*. It's about two women who leave the Canadian October crisis and travel across the States. 'They are women who have never had any opportunity for choice-making,' she says. 'Suddenly they are being transported across the country and they come into contact with the most amazing sorts of people. At the end of the journey there is a



François Truffaut's 'L'Argent de Poche'

violent act imposed on them. One survives and the other doesn't.'

She sees the project as one that would be perfect for Bob Fosse to direct, 'because of his sense of movement.' She would also like to work with Francis Ford Coppola, although she has never met either film-maker. 'I'd like Coppola to produce something I would direct. He's great about detail.' Tewkesbury is optimistic about her chances of getting future projects off the ground, even though for the present 'only about three people know who I am.' She feels that in Hollywood doors are now being opened to women in all areas of production.

PATRICIA ERENS,
VIRGINIA WRIGHT WEXMAN

Another Cinema

'Most commercial cinemas are sterile and impersonal—their queues, high prices, glossy ads, plush seats and soft music tend to anaesthetise us—the passive consumers.' So say The Other Cinema, the London-based independent distributor, and what they propose is an alternative cinema. They see this as a place where filmgoers can meet film-makers, attend seminars, see the latest work in video as well as the films the commercial distributors won't show. The aim, they say, is to build a 'popular' cinema, showing as many as a dozen films a week and free of the commercial pressures which dictate the programme policy of even the very few 'art' cinemas (five or six as against about 90 in Paris) which London can boast.

The place exists, at least as a shell. Last autumn The Other Cinema took up an option on the site of the old Scala Theatre in Charlotte Street, in the area which in more literary days used

to be called Fitzrovia. To turn the shell into a cinema would cost, they reckoned, about £50,000. With the promise of a matching grant from the BFI, a fund-raising campaign was launched; benefit screenings have included Susan Sontag's *Promised Lands* and Marcel Ophüls' *A Sense of Loss*. At the time of writing (late February), the money is almost there, just in time to meet the deadline on the option. If the promised cheques materialise, The Other Cinema hopes to have the lease signed and the building work started this month. Their plans include a 400-seat auditorium (or possibly a slightly smaller theatre, with an additional 50-seat viewing room); a club room; and facilities for video and television: a 'social space' as well as a cinema.

The search for this new cinema has been long and fraught. Set up in 1970, following a conference on alternative distribution, The Other Cinema (a non-profit-making organisation, registered as a charity) found what they hoped would be more than a temporary home in 1971 when they were offered the former Odeon, King's Cross and showed Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers*, then gathering dust on its distributor's shelf. Its success was their undoing: the cinema's owners saw what they were missing, and The Other Cinema were shown the door. Homeless, they concentrated on distribution, and now have some 170 films on their books. Their catalogue includes Godard, Straub, Herzog, Glauber Rocha, Ousmane Sembene and a large number of independent film-makers; and they have put both Frederick Wiseman and the political cinema of Latin America on the British film map. Some of their films (Marco Leto's *Black Holiday*, Faraldo's *Themroc* and *Bof*) have had West End runs. Others have been shown in regular Sunday

programmes in a theatre leased from London University.

Attendances at their Sunday shows encouraged The Other Cinema to think that they should look for a home of their own. The Charlotte Street site was found last year, after several previous hopes had been disappointed. If things go as planned, the new cinema will have three programmes a night, with regular seasons as well as new films. A particular ambition is that the cinema will provide a home for British film-makers, a place where they will be assured not only of screenings but also of some audience feedback. The cinema will be run on a membership basis, but admission prices will be kept low. There will also be a monthly newsheet and documentation for every programme. The point is to get people talking about what they see, both informally and in planned debates and seminars.

What this means, in theory, is spelt out in the fund-raising brochure: 'The constant involvement of those who work in film and television—directors, writers, actors, etc.—should result in the cinema providing an on-going forum for major cultural issues. But further, the whole concept of the programme will depend on the active participation of other, diverse groups of people who have rarely been offered common ground: teachers, trade unionists, critics, historians, sociologists, community workers, scientists... all contributing to the programming, and thus providing a stimulating cross-fertilisation of approach.' An ambitious experiment, to say the least, but one which The Other Cinema hopes will catch fire and spread outside London. With luck, and continued financial support, the place could be ready by July. All it will need then is the people to fill it.



ROSSELLINI IN '76

Philip Strick

'To practise good politics is less useful than to teach good politics to a large number of citizens.'—Socrates, in Rossellini's *Socrate* (1970)

For nearly ten years, we haven't been seeing much of Roberto Rossellini in Britain. Yet since 1966, when *The Rise to Power of Louis XIV* materialised with unexpected glory from a career which had seemed to write itself off in the disdainful episode of *Rogopag* four years earlier, Rossellini has written and/or directed no less than twenty-seven productions, equivalent to his entire output between *La Nave Bianca* (1941) and *Louis XIV*.

It stretches the point, perhaps, to create such a statistic by including the twelve one-hour episodes of a television documentary series written and 'supervised' by Rossellini (his son, Renzo, directed) in 1967, or all five episodes of *Atti degli Apostoli*, made for four television companies simultaneously in 1968. Nevertheless, the sheer volume of Rossellini's work in the decade that now finds him a zestful seventy-year-old is unquestionably astonishing. The choice of subjects, too, seems at first sight equally unpredictable, ranging briskly from Socrates to Pascal, from Augustine of Hippo to Cosimo de Medici, and from Descartes to the Messiah. One might guess that the director of *Rome, Open City* could come to be the writer of *Les Carabiniers*, but what are we to make of the gulfs that appear to lie between *Viaggio in Italia* (1953), *Vanina Vanini* (1961) and *Anno Uno* (1974)? Has Rossellini, after all, been rambling arbitrarily through history, an opportunist in search of an *auteur*?

A generalisation might be risked that could draw his films within hailing distance. Rossellini's characters have a childlike and aggressive innocence which, whether the context is war, marriage, the Church, India, majesty or poverty, leads them into disillusionment. Their endings are a form of suicide, moral or physical, when the nature of the struggle is fully understood and a final intolerable choice has to be made. At

the point in any Rossellini film when the individual must weigh his own wishes against the needs of his fellow men, individualism always loses. Pietro Missirilli goes to the guillotine, General della Rovere steps before a firing squad, Garibaldi hands Italy over to Victor Emmanuel, Socrates drinks hemlock, Alcide de Gasperi catches a train.

Like children, Rossellini's people see life

in terms of absolutes. If they elect to withdraw, then like the bereaved mother in *Europa 51* they withdraw completely. If they elect to adopt a cause, then like the ingenuous monks in *Flowers of St Francis* they adopt every aspect of it, discomforts, impracticalities and all. The half-life—a decaying marriage (*La Paura, Stromboli, Viaggio in Italia*), an inactive pacifism (*Era Notte a Roma*), a neglected Catholicism (*Vanina Vanini*)—proves in the end to be no life at all. To pick an example, a typically committed hero appeared in one of Rossellini's rare comedies, *Dov' è la Libertà?* (1953). This wilful innocent is a barber who after twenty-two years of imprisonment for a *crime passionnel*—he slit the throat of his wife's lover in mid-shave—is suddenly given a remission for good conduct. Pushed out into the society he has lost all touch with, but which he has always believed to be filled with honesty and kindness, he sets



Totò in '*Dov' è la Libertà?*'

about building a new life only to face sustained villainy at every turn. Even the sweet young girl he sets his heart on proves to be plotting blackmail against his former father-in-law for making her pregnant. So he disguises himself as the prison governor and returns blissfully to his own cell; ironically, it takes another act of violence before he is permitted to stay there.

The barber's refusal to abandon his code, even when he discovers its total irrelevance to the requirements of society in general, indicates a moral that the only refuge and reward for an innocent man in an evil world is incarceration. Told humorously, the point is better made by suggesting that the struggle is not won by retiring from it—on the contrary, the world stays evil and infects the would-be innocent into violence and deceit as he makes his escape. The barber (played by Totò on a perfect note of fussing melancholy), an idiot delinquent who can find no place for his beliefs within society, comes as a sour echo of Ingrid Bergman's wistful entombment in an asylum in *Europa 51*, the film Rossellini had made a few months earlier. The two productions mirror each other closely, both the central characters accepting responsibility for a death (in Bergman's case, the suicide of her neglected son) and attempting some kind of atonement by involving themselves with the lives of others. Neither has much of a chance, but they do give it a try.

Innocence again, meaning in this case a childlike non-commitment to any cause but oneself, is represented in *Il Generale della Rovere* (1959) by De Sica's charming old swindler, who gets the money to pay his gambling debts by offering help to families with relatives in Gestapo hands. Arrested while cheerfully telling a woman that the husband she knows to have been shot is alive and well, he is taken before the local SS Commander and given a choice of trial (and probable execution) or of helping the Germans by playing the role of an imprisoned Resistance leader and passing on any information he may receive about partisan activities. He settles for impersonation but soon decides that in war it's impossible to be on both sides at once, little as one may care for either of them. Finally disgusted by Nazi duplicity, if only because it is more brutal than his own, he elects for patriotism and dies a courageous, inspiring and rather useless death.

'You die unjustly!' protests the wife of Socrates some twenty-eight Rossellini films later. 'Would you prefer me to die justly?' responds her husband, true to the director's and his own form ('All I do is get others to think by posing questions'), later adding by way of quotable consolation: 'Remember that I was condemned to death at birth, by Nature.' In della Rovere's favour, one might observe that his urbane patter tended not to hit the audience like a shoal of darts delivered at a target; while Socrates, in *his* favour, makes no attempt to turn on the romantic comedy charm. If the outcasts are similarly doomed, Rossellini's later examples are certainly presented differently—for one thing, they say what they have to say, clearly and at length, and they have a great deal to talk about. In fact the objections that have most frequently been raised in connection with Rossellini's television works is that they aren't filmic at all, they

are simply visualised texts. Style and contemplation, the strengths of such masterpieces as *Germany, Year Zero* (1947), seem to have been sacrificed to statement, plain and uncomfortably simple.

When Rossellini came to England last November for the screenings of *Anno Uno* and *The Messiah* at the London Festival, it was quickly apparent that if sacrifice and martyrdom were his themes he was not aware of having relinquished one scrap of his enjoyment of the processes involved in portraying them. His audiences were not particularly charitable. *Anno Uno*, pirouetting endlessly around a succession of obscure non-events in the Italian politics of the immediate post-war period, seemed a non-event itself, while *The Messiah*, quoting scrupulously from the Gospels, aroused concern that so many quotations seemed unfortunately chosen.

Amid the ideological arguments, the films themselves appeared to fade from view, as if their substance were all words and nothing else—no colours, no characters, no movement. *Anno Uno* and *The Messiah* ring like conference halls with speech after speech, a concert of words, phrases, announcements that slip tantalisingly past before they can be absorbed, considered, discarded. Pencil poised in the dark, one may note that: 'Young and old are but waves of the same sea'; that 'It takes no courage to speak the truth' and that 'Man is made not for monologue but for dialogue' (the pencil marks are heavier for this one). But the record should be set straight; the quotations do no justice to the screen. Rossellini's images speak with their own kind of language, and their own clarity.

The opening scene of *Anno Uno* is a battleground. Tanks speed by, tents offer inadequate shelter to wounded men, civilian refugees scuttle down a slope as an air-raid begins, and on an opposite slope an anti-aircraft gun hammers at the sky. It's an obscure incident, serving only to set the stage, and Rossellini wastes no time on it—

the whole thing is done, incredibly, in a single shot. Before we can catch our breath, he is tracking through the ruins left by the raid, a jumble of bricks and beams from which rescue squads lift the torn bodies of the victims; in the background, a broken Madonna looks like just another corpse. And then he's in Rome, where a girl dodges a Nazi round-up and leads us to the central characters of the film, arguing, debating, planning their way towards a future security.

There was talk at one point of starring Gregory Peck as Alcide de Gasperi, who for ten years from 1944 was a leading architect in the reconstruction of the Italian political system. He's almost too easy to imagine in the role, frowning with innocent integrity; instead, Rossellini picked Luigi Vannucchi, who adds a kindly anonymity to the Peck image and merges so self-effacingly with his environment as to become almost invisible in rooms occupied by more than two people. After the film's emotive opening, the words of de Gasperi, expressed by this wraith-like form, sound appropriately more like popular opinion than an isolated viewpoint—it seems inconceivable that his call for national unity should be contested and ultimately ignored.

Rossellini punctuates the story of de Gasperi's perpetually frustrated career with frequent exterior shots, filmed with the same hypnotic camera continuity, of the society for which he is spokesman. Curiously, the device seems at the same time to explain de Gasperi's failure. His political manoeuvres are less easy to grasp than the immediately accessible images of Rossellini's locations, architecture and faces. The crowds speak of reality, the man only of theory. At the end, Rossellini rescues him with a beautiful scene among his family; wife and daughters stand silent around him, like the courtiers around Louis XIV, as the Christian Democrat makes a domestic farewell. 'God lets you work, then he tells you: "That's enough, now." Man's little mind is unwilling to accept that it's the end.'

'Anno Uno': Luigi Vannucchi (standing, right) as Alcide de Gasperi



Accused in Italy of having been made with fascist money (one million dollars of the budget came from the public-funded distribution company Italoaleggio, which makes the claim hard to understand), and of having surrendered to what *Cinema Nuovo* termed the 'fascination' of fascism—presumably on the strength of de Gasperi's equation of Communism with state totalitarianism, 'the enemy of freedom'—*Anno Uno* appears fated to satisfy neither the Italians nor the rest of the world. At the London Festival, nevertheless, it provided a valuable balance to *The Messiah*, serving to illustrate both how Rossellini streamlines his text to further his message, and how his use of the camera has paradoxically become so eloquent as to make words unnecessary. De Gasperi becomes Christ, and Christ becomes Socrates, even General della Rovere, in *The Messiah*, a film in which Tunisia provides the dazzling context for an interpretation of the gospels which—amid some indignation—implies that Jewish high priests caused Jesus to be crucified.

Rossellini made *The Messiah* for the cinema, but the style is no different from that of his television productions—with the possible exception that the long shots are a little more distant from their subjects. Again the eye of the camera is constantly on the move, gliding from close-up to close-up in a continuous curiosity, as if to cut from one position to another would be to sever our links with a parallel universe. At the Last Supper, filmed from what to anyone else might have seemed an impossible angle, Rossellini takes us smoothly, insistently, from one disciple to the next, examining their hands, beards, faces, and above all their shared participation in the event itself. As Christ and Barabbas are offered as alternative sacrifices to a small, grubby crowd, and Pilate strides in disdainful perplexity around an enormous courtyard, from victim to accusers to guards to victim and at last to a bowl of water for his hands, the camera makes not a single blink. It's a remarkable economy of description, and Rossellini intends that it should make us realise how much has been left undescribed—indefinite because neither words nor images can do justice to it. Whatever he has made of his theme—and from his answers to his critics it became evident that, for one thing, Rossellini isn't in favour of complexity—he has perfected his own manner of telling it.

In London, Rossellini faced the questions like the target for a firing squad. Small, immaculate, defiantly placid, as if knowing that here too he was not about to win any victories, he seemed to pluck his answers from some rich, invisible text such as those apparently consulted by the spokesmen in his films. On stage, or giving more relaxed audience in his hotel suite, he proved an inviolable oracle, retiring when necessary—as is an oracle's privilege—behind gently unanswerable rhetoric.

The figure of Alcide de Gasperi in *Anno Uno*, unfamiliar as he is to British audiences, seems to express a very simple philosophy of national unity?

ROSSELLINI: Simple, yes, in that sense de Gasperi was really Christian, and although he didn't succeed we seemed to accomplish

a certain amount under his guidance. But since he has gone, the conflict of dialectical confusion is so intense that nobody knows what to do. At a time like this, with not just Italy but the whole world in a peculiar situation, the confusion is so great that I feel it's important for us to be aware of our own history. If we reread these things, it will help us put order in our own minds.

Is film the best method to re-examine the past?

It's not the only way, but perhaps it's the easiest. Whatever the point of view, images have the quality of being more easily understood than any sort of verbal discussion. Film can show the context, it can remind us that everything happens in some context or other. It's so important to see how the hands are working, what kind of tools are being built; our lives are complex and we always simplify too much. All things are linked with each other—even the traffic on the road can influence politics and the economy—and with film it's possible to show this complexity.

But aren't your films increasingly concerned just with people talking to each other?

If one thinks of film or television as an entertainment, then it's necessary to pursue a different effect, but if you try (as I do) to present something educational then talk is unavoidable. For example, I made a film on Pascal, a philosopher, a very boring character who never made love in his life. When he was suffering, which was most of the time—he was always having pains of one kind or another—he solved problems of geometry. He really wasn't much fun. Well, RAI-TV were very reluctant to present a film which was so unlike their normal programmes. They took a survey before they showed it, and the survey revealed that only one per cent of Italians had even vaguely heard of Pascal. The film then had a single transmission, it was seen by almost ten million people, and another survey six months later found that 45 per cent of the population knew something about Pascal. And the same survey showed that during the same period there had been a big increase in the sales of books about Pascal, and about that era of French history.

Of course we are used to action and spectacle on our screens, but I think that at the same time we must get used to receiving a little more information. I'm aware of the danger of filming long sections of dialogue, but I am quite stubborn. I insist on them. I think it would be a tremendous adventure if little by little we could demolish our ignorance. I want to arouse curiosity in the audience, and this in turn can lead to the satisfaction of their understanding something new for themselves.

Have you now become, then, more teacher than film-maker?

Oh, I'm the same person that I always have been—film-making is simply a technique that I've acquired little by little. And the technique I use now, with the Pancinor camera that can zoom in here and pan out there, perfectly suits what I want the film to demonstrate. The dialogues could be filmed in other ways, but given the possibility of moving all the time with the zoom lens, I can add a lot of extra messages—reactions,

backgrounds, feelings, distractions—to stir the audience to want to know more. It's an attempt to reproduce what happens in life, in conversation, when one's attention wanders around the subject, looks away, then returns from a different angle. I think that conventional filming of these sequences—long-shot, close-up, close-up, close-up—would be intolerable. The challenge of filming them in an interesting way is something I find very exciting.

Do these enormous speeches cause problems for your actors?

In general, with few exceptions, I give the scripts to the actors at the last minute, because I don't want them to prepare themselves mentally. Otherwise I may have to demolish what they think in order to get what I think is the correct sense of a scene. So they memorise what they can and they improvise the rest. I don't mind; I can profit from their improvisations. It's the way I've always worked, although in the case of *The Messiah* the texts had to be accurately taken from the Scriptures (mainly the Gospel of St. John). We shot the film in English, often with the actors not understanding a word they were saying, so I wound up with the same sense of spontaneity as usual...

What were your intentions behind *The Messiah*? You avoid showing the Resurrection, but you end the film up in the clouds as if in support of the miracle.

I try to resist any kind of propaganda or interpretation in my work. I'm obsessed with not preaching anything, because I believe it's wrong, a violation of the personalities of the people watching. It's best to offer material and let each human being take from it what he wants. People should be given data to work with, to elaborate upon, and then—who knows?—perhaps they will be able to come up with something new. Anyway, I'm not religious at all. I'm the product of a society that is religious among other things, and I deal with religion as a reality. We are capable of thinking in metaphysical terms—that's a reality and it has to be dealt with. I tried to make *The Messiah* acceptable to everybody, with the intention of putting people together, not dividing them. People find belief in the fact that Jesus performed miracles. I find tremendous importance, rather, in what he said. 'The Sabbath was made for Man, not Man for the Sabbath' is, I think, one of the most revolutionary sentences ever spoken.

As a prompt towards new ways of thinking, aren't your characters rather passive? Socrates, for example, submits quite willingly to his fate.

Socrates is passive in the way that Jesus was passive. They accept the sacrifice, but it's a way to become very active, a way of impressing people, making them aware of what's going on. My effort in presenting them is that I try to understand what they might represent for us today. It's amazing that the words of these people have survived so long, that Christ has in a way conditioned two thousand years of history. I don't know if, without Christ, it would have been possible to have Karl Marx, for example. In my films I attempt to reread their words, out loud so that anybody can hear and reconsider the sense of those words for himself. I'm sure that the sketchy informa-

tion we all got about the Gospel at school, when we would rather have been playing football, left us with the impression of a boring text. A few sentences stick in the mind and on the strength of them we imagine that we know the word of Christ. In fact we don't know a thing about Christ. And if you checked on all the Marxists in the world today, you'd find the same thing, they don't really know Marx at all. A few words here and there, that's all. I'll make a film about Marx one day.

You've been quoted as saying that you believe power is not human, it's a thing born of cowardice, but your Louis XIV is far from cowardly in his pursuit of power.

It is a characteristic of man that he always refuses to accept responsibility, yet it's our duty to be responsible—for everything and to everybody. We must be responsible politically, socially, in every sense. When we protest against a dictator we must equally protest against ourselves for having allowed him to gain power. Our daily lives are governed by two fundamental drives, fear

and desire. There are certain people, like de Gasperi, who are idealists, utopians, and they find themselves promoted into power by the fears of others; yet they are opposed by the desire of others to preserve ideas that are already well established, who in fact resist the chance for an adventure. Historically we are trained to accomplish a certain kind of duty in society as individuals, and this may have gained something for the human race in six or seven thousand years but it hasn't achieved happiness, it hasn't achieved security. Today, we have accumulated so much knowledge that I wonder if we shouldn't be looking at ourselves in a different way, based on the realisation that society is a continuous failure.

Show me a single example of a civilisation that has survived for any length of time. Tourism is based on visits to the ruins of earlier civilisations. They die all the time, because they're imperfect, as Toynbee pointed out. And that imperfection is always the same—they are built on the idea that power has to be delegated to a single figure to provide inspiration, energy, work.

Well, perhaps it's time to try the opposite method, to allow the intelligence of the human race as a whole, as a species, to direct us, instead of leaving it to the intelligence of a minority, an elite.

Do you really feel that it's possible for people to learn from the past? Your own films seem to deal with a long succession of defeated men.

My central characters may be losers, but the audience can learn something from them. You gain a victory only by being crucified; without the Crucifixion the words of Jesus would never have survived. We're always creating tragedies around ourselves. But despite my bleak endings, I don't believe it's impossible for us to improve. We've gone to the Moon, nothing is impossible.

In view of your concern with these themes, do you become impatient with the less interesting aspects of film-making?

Never. The films don't take long to shoot (*Anno Uno* was six weeks, *The Messiah* was seven), but they take a long time to prepare, and the research itself is fascinating—there's so much to discover. I make a daily effort to demolish my ignorance. I read a great deal, work a great deal, and I try not to fall in love with a single viewpoint; I read a lot of books all together, turning from one to the other. The film slowly takes shape from them, and then with the research into costumes and locations it really starts to exist. To find a wall is as important as finding an actor. You know, when we did the series *Man's Struggle to Survive*, we rebuilt hundreds of old machines, rebuilt them ourselves. We looked at the original designs in the Vatican, which has the records for everything, and we learned how to make the machines work. We even reconstructed the early clocks for the *Medici* film, and the incredible gadgets for making gunpowder—every step is exciting. At the moment, I am preparing a series about Islamic sciences; and I also have in mind a film like *Intolerance*, dealing with ethics in history.

Do you ever want to return to commercial film-making, or do you feel that these films are successful enough in their own right?

If I wanted success, I wouldn't be making films like these—it would be a miracle if success resulted from them. I simply hope they will be seen, this year, next year, in ten years, some time. *Rome*, *Open City* and *Paisa* were totally ignored when they were first shown; then two to four years later they were discovered. I don't believe my work is wasted, in any sense. But mainly I try to live with pleasure; not to have a boring moment in my life, that's my main preoccupation. I think it would be possible for me to be a part of the industry, to be a very successful director, to earn a lot of money, to be respected, important. But I rejected all that, for the sake of adventure. I'm seventy and I don't have a penny. I don't care. I go on, and I have fun. When I set up a production, my first step is to build up a huge debt with somebody; I borrow money and I offer my best guarantee, that at my age I don't have a penny. You should think of the future, they say. Well, I'm working for the future, so that's all right. ■

'The Messiah'; de Gasperi and aides in 'Anno Uno'



ANDREI TARKOVSKY'S THE MIRROR



Herbert Marshall

One healthy development since the Stalin days in Russia is the recognition by Soviet critics of the existence of 'difficult, more difficult and still more difficult films.' But hard-line critics like Baskakov, Deputy Director of the Committee for Cinematography, still insist that all Soviet films must be 'made for the masses', quoting Lenin that cinema is a mass art. Baskakov attacks such films as Paradjanov's *The Colour of Pomegranates* and Tarkovsky's *The Mirror* as being 'elite films'. Baskakov, of course, is himself a member of the Communist Party elite.

Soviet critics like Bleiman or Lotman, however, speak out in favour of such films in the present era. They realise that modern art is more complex and many-layered, that the simple socialist-realist agit-prop films are out of date. In *Semiotics of Cinema and Problems of Cinema Aesthetics* (1973), Lotman writes: 'However art not only transfers information—it rearms the spectator by means of the perception of such information, creating its own auditorium. A complex structure of man on the screen makes the man in the auditorium intellectually and emotionally more complex (and vice versa, a primitive structure creates a primitive spectator). That is the power of cinema art and in that is its responsibility.'

Such a 'complex structure of man on the screen' has been created by Andrei Tarkovsky in his film *The Mirror*. His contemporary Sergo Paradjanov has on many occasions publicly declared his indebtedness to Tarkovsky. He told me in a taped interview: 'For me Tarkovsky is a phenomenon . . . amazing, unrepeatable, inimitable and beautiful. I am simply delighted to have such a contemporary. First of all, I did not know how to do anything and I would not have done anything if there had not been *Ivan's Childhood* . . . I consider Tarkovsky the No. 1 film director of the USSR . . . He is a genius.'

But *The Mirror* has been attacked by Party critics, like Baskakov and others, and relegated to the *Third Category*. Let me explain. When the official representatives of the Party and State judge a film they can give it three markings: 1st Category—means full political approval, widest distribution, up to a hundred copies for exhibition, and percentages and bonuses for its makers; 2nd Category—means approval, but not such a wide distribution or number of copies and more limited returns to the makers; 3rd Category—means disapproval, distribution severely limited to third class cinemas and workers' clubs, few

prints and no returns to the makers. Sometimes the film-makers are accused of wasting public funds and castigated, and their chances of future productions are affected.

Such was the case with *The Colour of Pomegranates*, which was at first banned for five years and then re-edited and released as 3rd Category, showing only at one Moscow repertory cinema for one or two performances a day. So *The Mirror* was not showing at all in Moscow when I arrived last year, and at only one neighbourhood cinema in Leningrad, Kino Teatr Mir. Like the vast majority of Soviet cinemas (despite Lenin's much quoted slogan 'the most important of arts for us is the cinema'), this was uncomfortable, wooden-seated, with bad projection and poor sound. So Tarkovsky's *The Mirror* was shown; but despite the drawbacks it emerged as a masterpiece. In a way, it is a kind of inverse mirror reflection of *Ivan's Childhood*, that being an objective biography of a Russian teenager in the Second World War, while *The Mirror* is a subjective biography of a boy in the Stalin days. However, *The Mirror* is presented as the biography of Andrei Tarkovsky himself, at different ages up to and including the present, and of his own mother (who appears in the film represented by various actresses for different ages and then as herself) and finally of his father, the poet Arseny Tarkovsky, whose poems are read by the actor Smoktunovsky.

The film is a superb example of Lotman's 'complex structure of man on the screen'—it is many-layered, jumping back and forth in space and time, from objective to subjective visualisations, as well as dream sequences of the subjective—a multi-mirrored reflection of the biography of the author-director, 'whose purpose is, as it were, to hold a mirror up to nature.'

I will do my best to describe it, but like *The Colour of Pomegranates* it needs a dozen viewings. I had only one. And as this is a subjective biographical film, my description has willy nilly to be subjective as well. Another critic will probably compile something that will seem to be from another film. For this is several films intertwined. Another very complex factor is the use at periodic intervals of poems by Tarkovsky's father. Poetry in itself complex, even when being read in a book; and how much more so when read aloud over a cinema screen and, worst of all, in a poor Russian cinema. So these are just notes of a first impression. And forgive me for much that I may have missed or misunderstood.

Tarkovsky has designed his film in three layers: first, real life, a really existing person and his relationships with his mother, his wife, his son, etc.; second, memories of this person; and third, his childhood dreams and nightmares. All three layers intertwine one with the other without any warning. Furthermore, a fourth layer is the interpolation of newsreel sequences relevant to the particular period. As is the fashion in modern film editing, there are no fade-outs or mixes to indicate a change. There are only jump cuts.

Indeed, one Soviet correspondent writing to the journal *Iskusstvo Kino* complained that *The Mirror* was like a film crossword puzzle. And in a sense it is: clues are given

but not the answers—those you have to find out yourself. Two critics in *Iskusstvo Kino* (No. 4, 1975) tried to answer the complaint: 'This film is a *confession* of an artist, in which he not only recounts what happened to him in this time, but tries to understand those times, to face the truth about himself and those around him, to delve into his conscious and subconscious reactions...'

Here are my notes about the actual film: in the symbolic prologue, a boy is shown with a stuttering defect, he cannot say what he wishes without stammering, and he has gone to a doctor who uses various methods including hypnotism and helps him overcome his defect—he can now speak out like anyone else. Then the film begins with the main titles, etc.

A woman is looking out over a rickety fence into a lovely green field, she is alone. A stranger comes through the grass and talks to her; he has a doctor's bag and he asks for a short cut; behind is the old farmhouse; a boy (her son, you assume) and the father are away somewhere. There is a sense of anxiety and fear in their behaviour that permeates the whole film. (I realised that this farmhouse was the same kind of Russian country *dacha* pelted with rain that the prodigal son returned to in *Solaris*.)

Suddenly, there is a terrible fire in the barn. It is magnified and crimson-red in the eyes of the child—his first fire. As if in a nightmare, everything is being destroyed in slow motion. Then a poem by Tarkovsky's father is read... The boy is looking into a mirror. Photograph of father. Colour film now black and white. A bullfight. Spanish Civil War. (I had a shock: some shots I recognised from a film I made in 1937, *Madrid Today—London Tomorrow*.) Fire of war to the fire of childhood, water cascading and flames.

Then an older mother is in the mirror. The colour of today. The camera tracks past a French poster advertising the film *Andrei Rublev* by Andrei Tarkovsky. The camera tracks round an empty apartment which must be Tarkovsky's. Only dialogue is heard, no one seen. 'When did Dad leave us?'—'1935.' Track continues. 'Forgive me, mother.' Yet, it seemed that all the visuals and the overlapping parallels were contained in the metaphors of the poems. Here is one, which I can now only roughly translate.

'To live in a house—
and not destroy the house.
I summon up anyone of the centuries,
Enter into it—

and build a house in it.
That's why your children and your wives
Are with me at the same table—
But the table's the same
even for grandfathers and grandchildren:
The future is fulfilling itself now...'

(And that is exactly what Tarkovsky does visually.)

Now we have jumped to another level: in an office, where the desk lamps shine like stars, the camera keeps moving irresistibly on through the offices into a printshop, past Linotype machines. Obviously it's a newspaper set-up; we pass a poster with President Kalinin and know that this is the Stalin era of the 1930s. The mother is rushing madly through the office and the printshop (and then we pass a portrait of Stalin), on to the

library, and then frantically scans through some press cuttings, had she made a mistake. And the sense of anxiety and fear now comes strongly to the surface—what is she afraid of? (Not until afterwards did I arrive at a conclusion, which I checked with Russian friends. Yes, it was fear that she had made a mistake about *him*—Stalin—which could mean arrest and prison in Gulag for any who committed even the slightest innocent error that could cast a shadow on his name. There was an incident in the offices of the Communist Party newspaper *Pravda*, when a misprint passed everyone and *Sralin* was printed instead of Stalin. *Sral* means 'to shit' and *sral* is past tense, *sralin* meaning a man who had shit! Everyone connected with the error, from the copy desk to the printshop, was arrested and sent to Gulag.)

Jump to another level, the pages of a book on Leonardo da Vinci are being clumsily turned by a boy's hand, not yet used to handling beautiful books. In black and white, the mirror appears again, and the question is heard over da Vinci's works: 'How does science and art influence people?'

The star lights shine on a work desk in the newspaper office. Then a telephone and the voice of his father, who had apparently deserted his mother. He has a guilty conscience about her. Throughout the picture he hears, 'You must see your mother. She is anxious about you.' (The same actress plays the wife [with her hair down] and the mother [with her hair up in a bun].) This persistent conscience and guilt about the wife he deserted is reminiscent of the hero in *Solaris*, who suffers in the same way and continuously tries to rid himself of this memory, but cannot.

Cut to another layer: a muzzle of a gun, the boy is at a shooting range, learning to handle a rifle and study for the badge 'Ready for Labour and Defence', which every Soviet schoolboy and girl is urged to train for. A military instructor is drilling them. He orders 'Right about turn!' The boy turns a whole 360 degrees. The instructor upbraids the boy, who answers, 'I only obeyed orders. I turned right about!' Then he picks up a hand grenade (which they are also learning to handle) and throws it. The instructor instinctively flings himself on it, as if to protect the boys from a live grenade, and then realises it is a dummy.

Then, suddenly, we are in the midst of real war—the Great Patriotic War, as they call it. But instead of the usual 'socialist realist' patriotic presentation, here the newsreel shots are chosen with astounding realistic effectiveness. Black and white again. Red Army units are crossing a river, but this is no obviously disciplined unit crossing a clear stream. Here straggling, exhausted soldiers are trudging with great tiredness through swamp and mud, hauling a machine gun, a mortar, with blood and sweat and tears, and everywhere endless sludgy sucking mud, that tries to drag them back and down. But these are the heroes; and Tarkovsky senior's poem is heard: 'The Immortals' (*Besmertny*). Here is what warfare mostly is: blood and mud and total drudgery.

Then we cut from this muddy landscape to a beautiful snowy field and effortless skating on the ice—and our boy is there.



'The Mirror'

Then, suddenly, 'Victory' and the fireworks from Red Square. But then victory is overcast with the titanic mushroom of the atomic bomb exploding and Hiroshima. Back to the boy skating. He stops and a bird alights on his fur hat.

Cut to a newsreel shot of a madly shouting crowd of similar youngsters, all waving one book, *Quotations from Comrade . . .*, and Mao appears in masses of portraits. (And, of course, you at once remember the inevitable quotations from Comrade . . . Stalin and his myriad portraits that flooded Red Square and the whole of the Soviet Union, paraded by tens of thousands of Soviet youngsters.)

Cut back to the colour and after the fire and to the beautiful book of Leonardo da Vinci. Then the soldier is back from the war in conversation with his wife, before the mirror, but the husband is not seen. Then the boy and the fire—forty years ago. Then the downpour of rain. Black and white to colour. Evacuation from Moscow (when Hitler attacked). The mirror again and music for the first time. (Hitherto poetry, dialogue, monologue, inner monologue and sounds—now the music of Bach, Purcell and Pergolesi.) Fire, mirror in door. Lamps on and off. Mother and son go to the country doctor whom we saw in the opening scene. She is selling her earrings to the doctor's wife. 'They become me,' the doctor's wife says, and buys them. Being wartime, and knowing they are short of food, she says she will also give them a chicken. She brings it in and says, 'Here, you can kill it.' Gives a chopper to the

mother. But mother has never chopped off a chicken's head before and is horrified. Only her face is shown as the chopper falls and feathers fly up into her face. She almost vomits, cries out for her earrings, takes them back and runs home.

The baby. Photograph of the husband by the mirror—which then turns red. (Another poem on death.) Her husband dies.

Colour: back to the birch trees and green fields as at the start and the old country farmhouse. They are young again together in the field and he asks, 'Which do you want, a boy or a girl?' (Bach choir). This is where the boy is conceived. Then the old burned out barn. A human cry. A bird cry. Russia's beautiful birch trees and the green of nature.

This is indeed a far cry from 'socialist realism', and the bulk of the criticism from the film experts, both official State, Party and personal, was negative. In the official journal *Iskusstvo Kino* the main article was a discussion on 'The Main Theme, Contemporaneity', held by a joint session of colleagues of Goskino (the State Film Organisation) and the Union of Soviet Cinematographers. In the course of this they discussed four films, but I am concentrating here on what they said about *The Mirror*.

Repeatedly, they raised the question of the film's 'accessibility'. 'Tarkovsky . . . chose too complex a form to express his thoughts and feelings and this made the film inaccessible to the perception of the viewers,' said N. Sizov*, Director of the

Moscow Film Studios. According to V. E. Baskakov: 'The film raises interesting moral-ethical problems, but it's difficult to find out what they're all about. This is a film for a narrow circle of viewers, it is an elitist film. But cinematography by its very nature cannot be an elitist art.' The director V. N. Naumov argued that, 'Many, including the most sophisticated viewers, couldn't make out what was happening on the screen. It remained for them something mysterious, un-understandable.' And from G. Kapralov: 'Tarkovsky is a subtle, clever artist, as separate beautiful episodes bear witness. But the film as a whole did not add up. Thought beats against great complex problems of the epoch, its tragic contradictions, but Tarkovsky did not succeed in speaking out clearly and to the end. He avoids as it were a final conclusion, necessary for an artist today.' (Of course he does. What else could he do in a monolithic Party society where drawing conclusions about the 'epoch's tragic contradictions', i.e. Stalinism, is now openly not possible?)

The veteran director Gerasimov, who defined *The Mirror* as 'an attempt to analyse the human spirit' by 'a man of very serious talent', added that 'it starts from a subjective evaluation of the surrounding world, and that inevitably limits the circle of its viewers.' Others involved in the discussion echoed the same view, with minor variations.

*It is alleged that this relatively new director of Mosfilm was previously the chief of the Moscow Police.

B. Metelnikov said: 'Tarkovsky took a risk and didn't win . . . His film is a "cinematic confession" and a confession demands courage. For that which Tarkovsky can do, no one else can do at all . . . but with deep regret I state, his film is for a narrow circle of people, well educated in cinematography . . . But creative searches are necessary, and that which Tarkovsky searches for cannot be blotted out.'

The film director M. M. Khudtsev said: ' . . . If I have to speak of the highest level, and I can't do anything else here, then I cannot consider this film a success . . . For here we are talking about a master, an artist from whom I always expect original but always profound thoughts, a serious dialogue with me, the viewer. But in this film no dialogue takes place, only a monologue, in which the author, not caring about an interlocutor, talks only to himself. And that distresses me. I have an impression that Tarkovsky doesn't really care how he is received, even by the most sophisticated viewer.'

G. N. Chukrai, maker of *Ballad of a Soldier*, etc., repeated alas the official Party view: 'One must not orientate oneself on some special type of audience. The dialogue between our cinematography and its viewers . . . must be understandable. Cinema Art is the art of the masses . . . And if an artist has something to say, he doesn't put his thought into code, he speaks that which he thinks . . .' But Chukrai ends up: ' . . . this film of Tarkovsky is a failure, but that doesn't mean we should draw and quarter him. But we must simply speak out frankly. Tarkovsky himself is more interesting than what he has made.'

The veteran director Y. Y. Raizman said: '*Ivan's Childhood* and *Andrei Rublev* were transparent. But already in *Solaris* one could detect an inexactness of language . . . Now Tarkovsky stands at the crossroads. He is a man of tremendous talent. He could brilliantly represent Soviet cinematography also on the international screen. People whom he respects must surround him with attention, help him.'

It is related, however, that unofficially representatives of the Cannes Film Festival who had seen *The Mirror* had intimated that if submitted to the 1975 Festival it stood a good chance of winning the Grand Prix. But what did the Party moguls do? They sent instead a film which most Russians consider just another official socialist-realist patriotic picture—Bondarchuk's *They Defended Their Fatherland*—which won no prize, no acclaim, and made no impact on the international box-office.

Those who do not know the general output of Soviet films today may not realise what an original film *The Mirror* is for a Soviet society, and even (as these various criticisms show) for sophisticated Soviet film-makers and critics. First, it is subjective in treatment and very complex and ultra-modern in style. Here is the *auteur* film that our French colleagues once picked out as the authentic film work of art. It is not only told entirely subjectively, but from a subjective point of view at different periods of life both in reality and in memories and dreams, from a boy, a teenager to a man, the director himself, and his father and mother.

Such a film has hitherto never been seen

on the Soviet screen. Eisenstein's films were to a larger degree than any other Soviet pictures *auteur* films—he wrote, designed, composed, directed, edited, everything from the tiniest gesture of Cherkassov-Ivan to the widest and deepest long shot of the procession on the snow vastness. But he himself was never directly the subject of his film, even though we know it is the young Eisenstein jumping on the Tsar's throne and kicking his legs in joy and the poor young Alexeiev being tricked into death by the Tsar, indeed the Terrible. But here for the first time is the subjective history of a Soviet film-maker in his own film.

And what is now here, and for which full credit must be given, is the honesty of the picture. There is a new honesty abroad in Soviet art. Those who have seen the films of Vasily Shukshin, director of *Kalyna-Krasnaya* (*The Red Snowball Tree*) who recently died such an untimely death, will recognise it. In Shukshin's film *Pechka-Lavochka* there is a country bumpkin, a collective farmer who emerges for the first time out of his distant village and reaches Moscow. But instead of the usual 'socialist-realist' depiction of what a good Soviet citizen is supposed to see and do on reaching his capital—wonder at its architecture and visit Lenin's tomb—he is bumped and roughly jostled by the crowds and his first task is to buy goods in Gum, the great Moscow super store, which he cannot buy in the village.

This is refreshing honesty; and it is the same with *The Mirror*. The newsreel shots are not 'socialist-realist' ones at all. Not the heroic warriors of the official monuments, but utterly exhausted footslogging soldiers hauling their weapons through mud and blood: weary, silent and grim. No glory, no heroic songs, no triumphant background music. Even when victory comes, with its fireworks, almost immediately there is the mushroom cloud and Hiroshima. And the events from the film-maker's story are none of the usually required highlights of Soviet history—no meetings, with passionate party exhortations, no fulfilling of the five year plans. The terror of the Stalin period is revealed through panic at the possibility of having made a printer's error. And the image of that period is also shown as in a mirror—the mirror of the behaviour of the Chinese and their 'personality cult' of Mao.

The style is a film crossword puzzle even for Tarkovsky's peers; and there are no doubt many strands I have missed, many allusions I shall find on second and future viewings. But what is really significant is the fact that *The Mirror* has been made and shown, despite all the echelons of censorship a film must pass through in Soviet society before it reaches the screen. And clearly if one takes the sociological approach (or the Marxist, if you will) all art is a reflection of the society that gives birth to it, and conversely every social stratum gives birth to a reflection of itself in the mirror of art. So this New Wave in Soviet art and culture must be fulfilling a social need. The bulldozing and fire-hosing of abstract paintings by the Soviet police did not wipe them away. On the contrary, a public exhibition had to be held for them later. So all the criticising and banning of so many Soviet films and plays is not doing away with them.

And if the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had any sort of Marxism left, it would have to admit that there is now a new class structure in Soviet society. I know they call them social strata, not classes. But there are now four classes: the aristocracy of Party and State elite, the *Apparatchiki*; the middle class, the scientific, artistic and technological intelligentsia; the working class; and the collective farmers. And one could add the lumpen-proletariat, the criminal black market stratum as shown in *Kalyna-Krasnaya*.

Now this was my own analysis, not of course accepted by Soviet critics, until I read Lotman's *Semiotics* and then a Soviet reply to those criticising *The Mirror's* limited appeal, which pointed out that there is an audience for such films. V. I. Solovyev said: 'We have highly educated viewers, able to understand highly complex phenomena, there are whole cities arising whose population consists of young scholars, why cannot one think about creating films for this more receptive audience?' So here was confirmation from a Soviet source. There is now a class of Soviet people who want more 'complex phenomena', modern works of art, abstract paintings, sophisticated films.

And since this is a social demand that is growing every day, some response must be given, even against the will of the Party. For as in every developing technical-industrial society, labour power is now less and less the source of value (which it was according to Marx) and it is now brain power which creates wealth. And the new creators of wealth, like any class in history (as our 'Marxists' are so fond of hammering home), will inevitably find their own expression in art. Thus this school of 'difficult films, more difficult films and still more difficult films' is growing; and although they may ban the films, put pressure on the artists to change their style, or even put them in prison (like Paradjanov*), they cannot stop a new class achieving its expression.

The strange thing is that in a Communist Party society somehow they never will recognise this themselves. Their great works of art seem to need recognition abroad before they are truly recognised at home. This was as true of *Potemkin* and *Earth* as of *Andrei Rublev* and *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors*. I recently heard from those who know Tarkovsky that he was deeply hurt when *The Mirror* was so severely criticised and relegated to a category which allowed it only minimal distribution. He is said to have talked of not wanting to make any more films. The Paradjanov case must have further depressed him, since he has been working with Victor Shklovsky and others in the so far unavailing effort to obtain Paradjanov's release. One can understand his mood, for all these reasons. The least we can do is to let these artists know that their work is appreciated and welcomed in the world outside. ■

*Sergo Paradjanov, about whom Herbert Marshall wrote in our Winter 1974/75 issue, is still in prison. When the Soviet Government declared an amnesty last year, announcing that all 'non-dangerous prisoners on good behaviour' would be released, it was assumed that Paradjanov was likely to be among those freed. At the time of writing, however, he remains in jail, his precise whereabouts being unknown.



'On St. Valentine's Day in 1900 a party of schoolgirls went on a picnic to Hanging Rock. Some were never to return . . .'
 Rachel Roberts (left and bottom) plays the Bournemouth-bred headmistress in this new Australian film by Peter Weir, director of *The Cars That Ate Paris*. Jan Dawson writes about the film on page 83.



PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK



Not even the name of Werner Hochbaum appears in most of the standard reference works and histories of the German cinema, although in a career which lasted just ten years he completed a very distinctive *œuvre* of a dozen films, not one of which is less than good, and which include one of the most admired 'art' productions of its day, *Die ewige Maske*.

In as far as this almost total erasure from the record can be explained, Hochbaum must be seen as one of the cinema's unluckiest victims of history. His first films were identified with the political left, so that after 1933 he was not a director whom the Nazi establishment was eager to promote. Most of his career was spent in the sort of low-budget production that does not enjoy much splash of publicity. He was recruited to Ufa production only at the end of his career; yet his identification in the late 1930s with Nazi cinema, and particularly his film *Drei Unteroffiziere*, ensured that his name would be consigned to the same obscurity as most of the rest of the prolific and high quality German production of the years 1933-1945.

The retrospective tribute at the April 1976 'Viennale' and the forthcoming National Film Theatre season represent the first opportunity to see and revalue as a whole the work of one of the most interesting German directors of the 1930s. Both the retrospective and this article have been made possible only by the unstinting collaboration of the Staatliches Filmarchiv der DDR. The article is an amalgamation of two separate studies by David Robinson and by the Viennese historian Herbert Holba, to whose research is due such limited information as has so far come to light on Hochbaum's personal and political history.

Werner Paul Adolf Hochbaum was born in Kiel on March 7, 1899, the son of a professional soldier. He began his career as a dancer and actor, then worked for a while as a journalist before turning to filmmaking. His interest was initially in film

theory, and he was in contact with the Dutch film clubs and the French avant-garde (speculations that he knew Jean Vigo are to an extent reinforced by evident reflections between the work of the two ill-fated directors). In the late 1920s Hochbaum

was living in Hamburg. Friends maintain that he made some experimental shorts, but none of these has come to light. He also worked as a film editor, apparently on documentaries and commercials.

The first concrete evidence we possess of Hochbaum's career is an already fully accomplished work, *Brüder*. Superficially, it belongs to the little group of left-wing, realist and critical films that appeared in the years 1928-32, in doomed resistance to a cinema that was already preparing the way for the future by preaching chauvinism, anti-semitism, servility and war.* *Brüder*, which was made for Hochbaum's own company, Werner Hochbaum Film Productions (formed in 1929 and dissolved on June 20, 1932), appeared in the same year as Carl Junghans' *So ist das Leben*, Leo Mittler's *Jenseits der Strasse* and Piel Jutz's *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*. Even the setting—the Hamburg dock area—is the same as in Mittler's film. But there are important differences. While the other films treat fictional subjects in a contemporary setting, Hochbaum reconstructs an historical event—a dockers' strike in the winter of 1896-97.

* As early as 1929 the left-wing writer Friedrich Wolf charged Ufa with dumping on the market films which were 'inconspicuous weapons in the class struggle, tasteless and odourless battle gas which by means of kitsch, syrupy and colourless Rheingold, Nibelungen and Faust films was undermining the intelligence of the film audience.'

Herbert Holba
and
David Robinson

THE ENIGMA OF WERNER HOCHBAUM



All the films were profoundly influenced by the Soviet cinema, but while the others in their concern with conventional—even sentimental—story forms lean toward Pudovkin (Vera Baronovskaia, Pudovkin's *Mother*, even plays the main role in *So ist das Leben*), Hochbaum favours Eisenstein in his hard recital of events and connections.

More significant is the contrast of Hochbaum's aggressive, agitational approach with the somewhat gloomy resignation of the other films, all of whose central figures end up dying as the only way to happiness. Siegfried Kracauer shrewdly noted that 'The sadness of these three films indicates that their underlying revolutionary inclinations are secondary attitudes rather than primary impulses.' Hochbaum's workers are left at the end temporarily defeated after their eleven-week strike, but still waving the Red Flag.

The other three films are categorised as 'Zille Films', re-creations of the world of the poor as portrayed by Heinrich Zille. *Brüder* is distinctly a Hochbaum film, portraying the milieu and life that were to continue to fascinate him. He delights for instance in the early morning reanimation of towns, though with a more human curiosity than Ruttmann or Cavalcanti. *Brüder*, shot by Gustav Berger, opens with stunning shots of the harbour, the little ships silhouetted against the glittering water; then moves to the contrast of narrow, shadowy streets between high tenement buildings. Among the other debris, the old drunk who startles himself by stumbling against a policeman (introducing the essentially anti-authoritarian theme of the film) is the first of several such morning-after ghosts in Hochbaum films.

If the most surprising aspect of *Brüder* for the modern spectator is its anticipation of neo-realism in the scenes of the workman hero's apartment and family life, the psychological study of his relations with his policeman brother, the breaking of the strike, the film has the added dimension of other influences and other styles. The debts to Soviet cinema are obvious, though Hochbaum rejects easy caricature figures of capitalism whilst borrowing satirical effects (the camera movement from the Imperial busts and portraits in the police house to the oafish faces of the sleeping policemen below) from the early Eisenstein. The brief prologue, with the main characters posed in formal tableaux, recalls the theatrical experiments of Germany and the USSR in the 1930s. Only occasionally does Hochbaum fall into crudely over-emphatic imagery: when the workman is arrested, the plaster angel with its 'Peace to All Men' banner is knocked down and trampled under police boots, and the workman is pushed to the wall where a nail pierces his hand in an image of crucifixion.

The film seems to have made practically no impact at the time. Failing to find a commercial distributor, Hochbaum handed it over to one of the Social-Democrat party's distribution centres. Its first screening, at Hamburg's Schaburgen cinema on a Sunday morning, was poorly attended. But if the Social-Democrat party proved poor dis-



'Brüder': 'anticipation of neo-realism . . .'

tributors, they nevertheless commissioned Hochbaum to make two short election campaign films. *Zwei Welten* contrasts shots of the rich (tennis players, big cars, villas, food and drink) with the poverty of the workers (mainly scenes from *Brüder* showing the worker's family—all incidentally played by non-professionals). The most important new material shot for the film was the aggressive titles. The last of these runs:

There are two kinds of rat,
The hungry and the fat.
They will decide your fate.
They take the pregnant mother's milk,
They tax the medicine of the sick,
They cut the pension of the maimed,
They cut your wages and relief.
They know only one God—
Profit . . .
CHOOSE BETWEEN DICTATORSHIP AND
DEMOCRACY.
SOCIAL DEMOCRACY MEANS WORK AND A
HAPPY FUTURE.

The film was unequivocal in its attack on capitalism and warnings of the imminent danger of fascism. A shot of a rich man changing his suit for a military jacket and swastika armband is without parallel in propaganda films of this period, apart from an SPD short of 1930, *Ins Dritte Reich*. Jutzi, Jungmans and Dudow were never so explicit about the dangers of fascism.

The shooting of *Wille und Werk* landed Hochbaum briefly in prison. One scene in the film reconstructed a true incident of November 1918 when revolutionary sailors ripped up the German flag. By the time the Minister of War had complained to the Minister of Home Affairs about this 'insult to the war flag of the Reich', however, the film had already been passed by the censor and used in the political campaign. The forthright attack on the ruling right-wing bourgeois parties in Kiel already marked out Hochbaum in higher circles as a subversive.

Hochbaum's chance to make a commercial feature came in 1932. The German film industry was flourishing despite economic and political crises. Five hundred features were made in the three years 1930–32. The market was flooded with quickies; and in

this competitive atmosphere, tales of gangsters, prostitutes and barrack life were in demand. Hence the modest Orbis Film Company welcomed Hochbaum's suggestion for an underworld story, *Razzia in St. Pauli*, with its milieu of thieves, whores and the outer edges of society in Hamburg's dubious St. Pauli quarter. The credit titles acknowledge the participation of 'the police, gangsters and "girls" of Hamburg.'

It is a film of atmosphere and milieu, in which Hochbaum for the first time fully indulged his fascination with the world of sailors' bars and the brothel quarter of Hamburg. The action is slight and recounts the events of a single day in which Ballhaus-Else hides Karl, a tough sailor on the run from the police. In the course of a day of love and a night on the town, they dream of escaping, leaving behind Hamburg and Else's tippy regular lover. But late at night there is a police raid (*razzia*); Karl makes his getaway; and Else wakes the next day, just like the morning before, in the bed of Leo, the pianist of the Kongo Bar. The harbour is waking up; in the courtyard below an organ-grinder plays, and on the soundtrack the voice of Ernst Busch—then working with Piscator's Theater am Nollendorfsplatz and later to become one of the great singer-players of Brecht's Berliner Ensemble—sings the *Song der Hafnarbeiter*:

'Every morning through the big city
Where dust—instead of dew—falls from
Heaven,
Marches the army, the great, grey
workers' army.
Money summons them to their machines:
Give us this day our daily bread,
Master of the world—
We who create
Your riches . . .'

(Perhaps Busch's collaboration indicates an old acquaintance: he and Hochbaum were exact contemporaries as boys in Kiel, where Busch made his stage debut.)

Razzia in St. Pauli is very different from the average low-budget film of 1932. St. Pauli becomes a metaphor, a 'world of the soul'. The underworld, the tarts and



'Razzia in St. Pauli': Gena Falkenberg

thieves, are really an ordinary bourgeoisie; the protagonists are enchained by everyday rituals and by wishful thinking, escape bids which only lead back to prison. They are all prisoners in a decaying world whose denizens have surrendered their past and lost faith in the future. Hochbaum is intimating the lethargy of the German petit-bourgeois, their passive approval of destined events, their pitiful inability to develop class consciousness. But if few contemporary critics seemed to recognise the use of an apparent *Dirnentragödie* to explore contemporary malaise and passivity, the overtly aggressive finale did not escape the National Socialist censorship, which cancelled the film's distribution licence on December 7, 1933. Hochbaum had become a still more dubious figure in official eyes.

Apart from the sinew this underlying metaphorical purpose gives the film, the remarkable exhilaration comes from its technical virtuosity. A musical pace and vigour carry it from start to finish in one overall sweep; and the shifts and variations of mood are so deft and decisive that they too invite musical comparisons. The languor of Else's sleazy bedroom contrasts with the frenzy of night life, the purposeful swirl of police cars through the night streets, the escalating chaos of the raid. Night in the Kongo Bar starts dismally, with three unappetising whores trying to interest some stray customers; then hots up to a hectic pace which is interrupted again when a bibulous old street-singer performs a comic ballad, and the tipsy Leo plays sentimental music. Characteristically, Hochbaum singles out and vividly characterises individuals in the crowd: a stout elderly lady vitalised by the approach of a bored young gigolo; the stolid old cloakroom attendant, sitting by her tip saucer, her sangfroid unaffected even during the police raid, when her chair is snatched from under her to assist a gangster's getaway through the lavatory window.

Hochbaum worked for Orbis on *Besserer Herr gesucht Zwecks*, a vehicle for the comedy star Szöke Szakall (later, in Hollywood to become S.Z. 'Cuddles' Sakall), and was then asked to help out on *Schleppzug*

M.17, the story of a tugboat captain who succumbs briefly to the wiles of a city siren, written by Willy Döll, co-author of *Jenseits der Strasse* and *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*. P.M. Film began the production, and Heinrich George (who as a child had dreamed of being a tugboat captain) accepted a very modest salary (30,000 RM) to star and assume artistic direction. Döll was to direct, but withdrew after difficulties, leaving George to take over. When funds ran out, Orbis and Fundus Film set up new finance and called upon Hochbaum, who completed the film with a five-day schedule—three days in the studio, two on location.

His name appears nowhere on the credits, perhaps not altogether surprisingly. He was a beginner while George was already a big name; and it is possible that it was only George's enthusiasm which assured the completion of the film at this critical time, when apart from *Schleppzug's* own problems of finance and a threatened plagiarism suit (by the representatives of Bela Balasz) the Nazis had come to power, with a consequent exodus of Jewish film workers. Even so there may be significance in Hochbaum's complaint to an interviewer in 1933 of the industry's exploitation of unemployed artists, even to the extent of denying credit for their work.

Even without the signature, it is clear from comparison with Hochbaum's other work that only he could have made considerable parts of it. Familiar images recur: the river's morning awakening (in Berlin this time), the characteristic superimpositions, the morning-after drunk. Our introduction to Captain Henner (George) is an irresistibly silly scene of his morning toilet. Laying about him with a pail of cold water, he washes everything in sight: after his own rotund person, he starts on his naked little son, his dog, the deck, the canary and the flowers in their pots.

From the viewpoint of this remote backwater and the milieux of bars and cabarets, the film evokes with remarkable vitality the life and times of the last days before Hitler. The dazzling climax of the film shows the temptress luring Captain Henner away

from his family. The Henners in Sunday best make their stately progress through the park, the paths flanked by mocking baroque nude statuary. Henner becomes conscious that the siren is following ever closer, staring with great black eyes. His wife too becomes aware of this alarming woman. Their pace quickens; so does hers. The tempo rises to panic as they arrive in the Potsdamer Platz. The camera, too, rises to show the square from above as Henner's track suddenly veers off to accompany the woman, leaving the gaping wife and child stranded in the square. Although the setting is an actual location (passers-by stare into the camera as in a Lumière film), the scene succeeds in externalising the characters' inner states of mind—as do Henner's later drunken hallucinations in the bar.

The happy ending is got over with decent despatch. Few of Hochbaum's stories arrive of their nature at the happy end which was required in the sort of low-budget film on which he was generally employed. Almost cynically, it seems, Hochbaum coolly does his duty and gets it over with as quickly as possible. This is nowhere more apparent than in *Morgen beginnt das Leben*, released on August 4, 1933. Ostensibly a psychological study of a man discharged from prison after a five-year sentence for homicide, and confronted in the space of a few hours with new situations and problems, the plot is even slimmer than that of *Razzia*. Robert's wife Marie fails to meet him at the prison gate because she has overslept after working late the night before. The rest of the film is concerned with the misunderstandings and mischances which continue to prevent their meeting, and Robert's escalating panic. The structure—the parallel lines of action which resolutely refuse to converge—is deftly managed. It is essentially a visual picture: there are barely a couple of dozen lines of dialogue, partly because the principal characters spend most of their time alone, partly because what dialogue there is, is as spare and elusive as the visuals themselves.

Hochbaum's most striking effort is to achieve repeated references to the year 1928, through the protagonist's flashback recollections of the year he went to prison. In years to come the National Socialist cinema would not tolerate such a confrontation of two periods, a dialogue with the old Weimar Republic. Not that *Morgen beginnt das Leben* could in any way be said to fit into a cinema which rejected 'that intellectual liberalism which indicates anarchy of the intellect': its characters hardly supported the Party thesis of 'Germany—Advance and Lead the World'. The film had little distribution, and Hochbaum had to wait until 1934 for a new offer, from Austria.

Austrian production at this period was already perilously dependent on the German market, which favoured only films made in collaboration with German writers and artists, in accordance with German directives and with no Jewish involvement. Hochbaum had satisfied the Film Guild of the Reichsfilmkammer of his Aryan descent (his membership card was No. 3424, issued November 15, 1934; the Guild's motto was 'Film-makers, fulfil your mission and do not forget that you represent the German

spirit'). *Vorstadtvarieté*, Hochbaum's next project, had a story vaguely reminiscent of Max Ophüls' adaptation of Schnitzler's *Liebele*, which had broken box-office records. Both films are about romantic Viennese girls and dashing soldiers; both star the incomparable Luise Ullrich (called Mitzi in both roles), both end in a suicide (though Hochbaum's ending was compromised after the film was finished). There, however, the comparison ends. Ophüls determinedly sweetened Schnitzler's 1893 play, while Hochbaum kept all the underlying cruelty and anger of his original. When the film was released, indeed, the title and author of the play on which it was based, Felix Salten's *Der gemeine Private Joseph Kernthaler*, were carefully omitted from the credits, and perhaps not even revealed to the German film authorities.

Felix Salten (1869–1947) not only wrote *Bambi* but also the most famous Austrian pornographic novel, *Josefine Mutzenbacher*. Both books have in common the theme of youthful curiosity, though Josefine's seeks more sophisticated outlets than Bambi's. *Der gemeine Private Joseph Kernthaler* was written in 1899, but was not staged until 1919 because of its naturalism and its antimilitarist attitudes. In the scenario submitted the anti-militarist elements were played down, and in the film the love story element and the pathological jealousy of the soldier hero are brought into relief; but the absurd jingoism of the soldier's father (played by Hans Moser) and the cynicism of the cabaret artist played by Oskar Sima are unambiguous. Between 1935 and 1945 the release version of the film was progressively pruned, until all such 'defeatist' material had been eliminated.

Hochbaum was not promoting his popularity in Germany, although the film's Austrian provenance and Viennese 'colour' softened criticism. He was unable, however, to prevent the substitution of a happy ending, which seriously weakens the film's impact. In Hochbaum's finished version the heroine commits suicide (in the play she is shot by her jealous lover). With the lame excuse that the public demanded it (though the public had cheerfully accepted the tragic end of *Liebele*), the producers substituted a last-minute rescue and reconciliation. Thus the girl is not, after all, driven to her death by the soldier: the image of the army remains untarnished.

Hochbaum's most famous film (the only one, indeed, that was even vaguely remembered until the rediscovery of *Brüder* in 1973), *Die ewige Maske*, was produced in Austria and financed with Swiss funds. The hospital scenes seem to have been shot in Bern, but the major part of the filming took place at the Rosenhügel-Atelier in Vienna. Nevertheless it was entered as a Swiss film in the 1935 Venice Biennale, and has gone down to history as a Swiss production—for Paul Rotha 'the outstanding Swiss film before the war.'

Adapted from a novel by the Swiss writer Leo Lapaire, it is the story of a young doctor (Mathias Wieman, who had played the jealous hero of *Vorstadtvarieté*) who suffers a nervous collapse as a result of the scandal following the death of a patient on whom he had tried a new serum. Though the anonymity of Salten had apparently

been successfully maintained, the German authorities could not fail to perceive that this film was infiltrated by 'Jewish ideas' and Freudian notions of psychoanalysis. The treatment of the mentally disturbed was a taboo theme: Hitler's assertion in *Mein Kampf* that 'when the strength to fight for one's health has sapped, then the right to live in the world of struggle is forfeited' had signalled inhuman innovations in medicine and science, including the propagation of euthanasia and the denial of psychoanalysis.

Hochbaum's career in German films could have been abruptly ended, but for the excellent foreign reviews, the Venice prize for the Best Psychological Study, and a National Board of Review award as Best Foreign Film of the Year. German film politicians reluctantly acknowledged their difficult but now internationally celebrated director with ambiguous compliments like 'great talent' and 'avant-gardist'. Critics devised tortuous justifications of the content of the film: 'One point of the film has been completely misunderstood, particularly in America, and that is the ideology of the story. The psychoanalytical part of the film is considered to be an interpretation of Freudian theories. How they arrived at this conclusion is inexplicable and the film does not corroborate it. The emotional conflicts of Dr. Dumartin are neither caused by nor can they be solved by sex. The nature of this conflict . . . is a purely moral one and is practically a Prussian conflict . . . The ethical question which arises is: is it preferable to act and free oneself from guilt or do nothing because one fears responsibility? The film's answer, its ethical lesson, is: it is better to act and if necessary take the blame upon oneself rather than to remain innocent but at the same time inactive and without will power.' It is not easy to reconcile this justification with the clear sexual symbolism of Olga Tschechowa's skin-tight dress with its spider-web design. But then, a considerable imaginative effort was required to change a Swiss film with an Austrian cast into a 'Prussian drama'.

The film was shown in England, by the Film Society and at the Academy Cinema; and the English reviewers concerned themselves only with aesthetic questions. Seen today, the central story is so conventional (degenerating to crudish melodrama when the wife of the dead patient herself fakes illness to persuade the deranged doctor that his serum, now proved and found effective, is needed) that it is hard to account for the extreme venom of some trade reviewers ('suitable for pseudo-intellectuals and imitation highbrows'). Even the favourable reviews were inclined to praise the careful

'Morgen beginnt das Leben'



reconstruction of the hospital scenes at the expense of the extended expressionist sequences in which Hochbaum set out to realise the doctor's hallucinations. Today, less reverential to Freud, we might be inclined to reverse these judgments. The neo-documentary treatment of the hospital scenes is impressive, certainly, by comparison with contemporary hospital stories; but in relation to Hochbaum's other work and known preoccupations, the hallucinations are much more interesting to the modern spectator. The figures of the doctor's conscious life reappear in strange guises in his eerie dream world, an expressionist nightmare of shadows, lights, mysterious tunnels, an electric powerhouse which suddenly and violently explodes around him. He meets and challenges his own reflection: this is the first of three films in which Hochbaum was to deal with personalities that become totally divided.

The Venice success forced the recognition of Hochbaum as a significant talent. With *Leichte Kavallerie* he finally had access to Germany's major studios, with more money, more important actors and sophisticated technical means. This was important to a director who valued Hollywood perfectionism, who is said to have appeared fanatical in always demanding more than his resources could offer. In the 1937 Year Book of the Reichsfilmkammer, he wrote: 'Only when we possess the same highly developed techniques [i.e. as Hollywood] can the real mission of German film art, which is now in the film age of impressionism so to speak, begin . . . Until then the creative film artist must repeatedly cry out to the industry: Give us the technical means which, without dominating us, will leave us free to create and produce. As long as the real film-maker has to work with unsuitable or improvised techniques, valuable time will be wasted. He will continue to try to obtain what is necessary. This will not make him liked, but it cannot be avoided. Sooner or later his efforts will be recognised and he will be rewarded.' Hochbaum, certainly, could never be accused of making himself liked, where the authorities were concerned.

Leichte Kavallerie, however, was a film of great charm and gaiety, with a slight and silly story about a girl who runs away from her unkind father to become the star of a travelling circus. The circus proprietor becomes madly jealous when she falls in love with a stable lad, and abandons the spectacle, 'Light Cavalry', intended to launch her star career. Nevertheless, the heroine and her friend the clown present the spectacle in Budapest, where it is a triumph and everyone is happily reconciled, while the stable lad turns out to have been a Hungarian aristocrat all the time.

Adapted from a novel by Heinz Lorenz-Lambrecht, *Umwege zur Heimat*, the film was intended by Ufa to launch their new star Marika Rökk (who is engaging, and does her own trick riding), and was evidently made on a fairly modest budget. Hochbaum was able to explore his own interests, however. Again he develops the theme of neurotic jealousy. In the treatment of the circus and its backstage his old documentary and neo-realist inclinations are in evidence: shot largely on location, the

film delights in details of circus life and work. Hochbaum the cinephile seems, moreover, to have discovered the American musical. The extended spectacle that ends the film is a notable shoestring tribute to Busby Berkeley, complete with sub-aquatic chorines and all the geometry, crane shots and verve of the American master, spiced here and there with Hochbaum's characteristic irony.

If *Leichte Kavallerie* indicates an admiration for Berkeley, *Der Favorit der Kaiserin* revealed Hochbaum's lasting admiration for von Sternberg—already demonstrated in *Schleppzug M. 17* when a cabaret number is staged in deliberate pastiche of 'Falling in Love Again'. This stylish costume comedy represented a fairly ambitious project for the Itala Film GmbH of Berlin, which usually concentrated on modest budget films, generally comedies in multiple-language versions. Relying on taste and wit and delicate satire, Hochbaum clearly gave the company more than their money's worth with this frothy intrigue, concerning the complications when the lover of one of the Empress Elizabeth's ladies-in-waiting is taken to be the new royal favourite. The performances—Olga Tschechowa, Adele Sandrock, Trude Marlen—are deft and witty; and there is the appearance of another of Hochbaum's morbidly jealous lovers in the person of Count Potozky, ousted favourite of the Czarina.

Returning to Vienna, whose atmosphere and artists he clearly found peculiarly sympathetic, Hochbaum made one of his best films, *Schatten der Vergangenheit*, for Donau Film GmbH. Scripted by Walter von Holländer and Karl Buda from a story by Georg C. Klaren (an experienced Austrian-born writer who later directed *Wozzeck* in the DDR), the film has striking similarities with a much later Bette Davis vehicle, *A Stolen Life*. Luise Ullrich plays twin sisters, Helene and Betty Gaal. Helene is released after a wrongful imprisonment and arrives at the house of Betty, the capricious darling of the Viennese revue stage. Betty spirits Helene off to a hideaway on Lake Balaton, but on the way there is a storm, and

Betty is drowned. Helene is rescued and taken to be Betty; her protestations are put down to delirium. At first reluctantly and then (as she falls in love with Betty's lover) willingly, Helene assumes the extrovert personality of her dead sister.

The central scene, in which the possession of one personality by the other is confirmed, is more powerful and accomplished than equivalent sequences in *Die ewige Maske*. Still dazed from the accident, Helene is awakened in the night by a storm, which brings back images of the wreck on the lake. She seems to see and hear Betty at the window; and passing a mirror she sees not her own reflection but Betty's. The background is filled with menacing, expressionist shadows which assume the distorted silhouettes of the male chorus from Betty's revue number seen earlier in the film. The climax of the sequence suggests that as a maker of films of terror and the supernatural Hochbaum could have been second to none.

Another Austrian production of this period, *Hannerl und ihre Liebhaber*, has so far eluded rediscovery, though its story clearly contains typical Hochbaum elements: an older man falling in love with a young girl and being led into misunderstanding and unjustified jealousy.

Back in Germany, Hochbaum made *Man spricht über Jacqueline*, based on a novel by Kathrin Holland which was filmed again in Britain as *Talk About Jacqueline* in 1942. (The director of the British version seems to have been Paul Stein, though Denis Gifford's *British Film Catalogue* credits Harold French.) A comparison of the plots of the two adaptations of this rather silly story about a girl whose loyal sister claims her shady past as her own, in an attempt to hide it from the heroine's prudish bridegroom, is illuminating. Hochbaum manages to make a light, dexterous, even sophisticated comedy out of the material, but at the same time introduces undercurrents of his own now recurrent preoccupations with division of personality, morbid jealousy, misogyny and the somewhat predatory character of women (in Hochbaum's film

the woman pursues the man; in the English version the roles are reversed).

Recreating the English country scene and bohemian Paris in the Berlin studios, Hochbaum's feeling for atmosphere for once deserts him. The country place is comically baronial and Germanic; the Paris scenes are all plaster and board. His next film, *Ein Mädchen geht an Land*, reveals still more clearly how restrictive studio facilities could be to a director who used location so well. The film deals with his well-loved river folk, and harbour scenes in Hamburg and Kiel; but after some typical establishing shots of the harbour and ships, he is obliged to forsake locations for studio sets—the horribly picturesque little cottage where the heroine lodges with her aunt and uncle; murky streets which echo with the sound of footsteps on wood.

The setting does not impair the reality and warmth of the characters, taken from a novel by Eva Leidmann. After life with her father and brothers aboard a freighter, the plain heroine (the excellent Elisabeth Flickenschildt) goes ashore after her fiancé is lost at sea and takes up domestic work. Her determination only to marry a seaman makes her prey to a marriage swindler; but she eventually achieves happiness with a widowed landlubber. Hochbaum's signature remains unmistakable: the characteristic superimpositions; the virtuoso handling of the storm scene; the domestic scenes in the cramped quarters of the freighter; the tact with which Erna's reaction to the news of her fiancé's death is handled; the scenes in the little harbour bar with its mildly criminal proprietors and its guests who tango happily past the 'No Dancing' notices; the ship-in-a-bottle which turns to a macabre ghost ship in Erna's nightmare; the odd relationship of her employers; the scene in which the wife quite gratuitously dons a military style uniform (like the heroines of *Leichte Kavallerie* and *Vorstadt-variété*).

No one in a Hochbaum film is ever quite good or bad. The con man Jonny Hasenbein remains a sympathetic figure, despite his cruel deceptions on poor widows, and there is poignancy in his last farewell as he passes Erna in the street. This kind of moral equivocation, a refusal to impose definitive traits of heroism or villainy, was deeply unsympathetic to the Nazi mind, which liked to have its morals clear, at least according to its own lights. The film was not much favoured. Nevertheless Hochbaum was assigned to an officially approved subject, *Drei Unteroffiziere*. It was to prove his last film.

It was a long way from *Brüder*. It is not hard to see why the film was formally prohibited after the war by the Allied authorities. The setting is a barracks and the heroes are Wehrmacht soldiers. Hochbaum brings all his mastery of atmosphere to a night scene in the barracks yard where passers-by emotionally salute the lowering of the Nazi flag. The moral of the end of the film is that the hero recognises his paramount duty to fatherland and comrades, and accordingly gives up love in favour of the higher cause. The final shot shows the Swastika flag blowing in the wind, backed by the stirring call of 'Deutschland über Alles'—a grotesque echo of the last shot of *Brüder*. Was

'Ein Mädchen geht an Land': Elisabeth Flickenschildt



this the last of Hochbaum's cynically expeditious happy endings? Certainly it is hardly less arbitrary and irrelevant to the logic of the story than the conclusions imposed on earlier films by commercial requirements. 'How romantic—soldiers, barracks, music, pretty girls,' says the world-weary *Kapellmeister*, the heroine's older lover, with heavy irony. It is the same world of tortured emotion as in *Vorstadtvarieté*; and the music of *Carmen* (which is being rehearsed in the theatre where much of the action takes place, with a very young Elisabeth Schwarzkopf in the title role) proves an appropriate *leitmotiv*.

Drei Unteroffiziere is a film of brilliant bravura scenes: the military exercises; night scenes in the barrack yard with farewells under the lamplight; a parade called in the middle of the night which in thirty seconds generates the excitement and geometric ingenuity of a Busby Berkeley spectacle. The love scenes have a genuinely erotic quality unlike any other film of the period, but reminiscent of *Razzia*.

At the première, the scenes of barrack life and manoeuvres were enthusiastically applauded, but other aspects of this story of three non-commissioned officers were less pleasing to orthodox Nazi thought. Günther Schwark, in the *Berlin Film-Kurier*, wrote: 'Their temperaments are various—careless, good-tempered and intellectually superior. The latter is thrown into conflict with his military duties when he falls in love with an actress... The conflict appears rather exaggerated when the N.C.O. considers deserting. But perhaps man is a victim of his own strength...' The writer found it necessary to make excuses for Hochbaum's association of the power of sex with the army. It was not necessary to apologise for constant homages to Henry Hathaway's *Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, since the film was highly regarded in Nazi Germany and was for years shown to the Hitler Jugend to encourage a spirit of military sacrifice and loyalty. While *Drei Unteroffiziere* could on one hand be seen as propaganda to extol the armed forces and promote morale, it was also alone in films of the time in posing a dangerous question: are love, sex and personal happiness really wrong?

The film did nothing to retrieve Hochbaum's reputation with the authorities. He had progressed no further than the screenplay of *Donauschiffer*, a cheerful story of the peregrinations of a Danube tugboat, written in collaboration with H. G. Kernmayr,* when the blow fell. Chance gave Goebbels the weapon he had probably long awaited. Someone recalled that in 1923 Hochbaum had been charged with espionage, when a letter offering his services as a spy and addressed to the French embassy was found on his person. Hochbaum was discharged: the letter had not actually been sent, and it was pleaded that the penniless youngster had written it only to convince a creditor that he would soon be coming into funds. Nevertheless, the resurrection of the case was enough to demonstrate 'political and moral unreliability'. A decree of June 21, 1939 informed him that 'every activity in the German film is henceforth forbidden.'

It was made clear that it was advisable for him to volunteer for the front; and he



Anti-Nazi propaganda in 'Zwei Welten' (1929); love and militarism in 'Drei Unteroffiziere' (1939)



joined the 234th Veterinary Company of the 163rd Infantry Division. On November 11, 1941 he was discharged as unfit: a lung ailment from which he had suffered had deteriorated. Efforts to get his Reichsfilmkammer membership renewed were unavailing; and the blacklisted Hochbaum existed by selling scenarios under assumed names.

Somehow he survived the war, and was among the first to resume work, full of optimism for the New German Film. Plans for a neo-Expressionist film, *Der Tanz in der Nacht*, for Defa (which produced the first post-war film, *Die Mörder sind unter uns*) were already under way when his lung ailment worsened. He died of infectious tuberculosis on April 15, 1946 in Potsdam.

Hochbaum must remain to a great extent enigmatic. The shortage of concrete facts leaves the films as our principal evidence for the psychological portrait of the artist. His relatively short creative period and early death, the war in which so much was lost, leave many questions unanswered. People who worked with him tend to shrug when asked what he was like. Contemporary press references are few and inexact. As a director who was only tolerated and whose past was dangerous, he sought no publicity and received almost none.

Among the contradictory accounts of those who knew him, however, certain factors are consistent. He is described as a depressive, who would shift from one extreme of mood to another. The film historian Rudolf Certel describes him as 'an individualist and anti-militarist, who made no bones about his convictions. Un-

fortunately he led a life which was extremely detrimental to his health.' Instability between periods of elation and depression made him an easy prey for his mistresses, some of whom exploited him. Hans Müller, for years his assistant, explains that despite his high regard for Hochbaum, he stopped working with him: 'The reason was a woman. He was so obsessed that he was ready to direct any old film as long as he earned enough to satisfy her many wants.' Müller presumably has in mind *Hannerl und ihre Liebhaber* (1936) and *Man spricht über Jacqueline* (1937).

It is hardly surprising if a man of such an unstable emotional temperament should develop in his films a 'hero' who had little in common with the contemporary screen ideals of the German man. Karl Ritter's *Urlaub auf Ehrenwort* typifies this ideal: manly, aggressive, propagator of the species, erotic, humorous, tough, intellectual, patriarchal, dominating, patriotic, archaic, sacrificing, possessed of the death wish, honest, demagogic, invulnerable, eternal.

Hochbaum's men are not of this type. In turn they are primitive-vulnerable (sailor Karl in *Razzia in St. Pauli*), pathologically jealous (Robert in *Morgen beginnt das Leben*, Josef Kernthaler in *Vorstadtvarieté*), lasciviously perverse (Franz Ebeseider in *Vorstadtvarieté*), introverted and schizophrenic (Dr. Dumartin in *Die ewige Maske*), resigned and sexually inhibited (Clown Rux in *Leichte Kavallerie*), refined and erotic (Count Potozky in *Der Favorit der Kaiserin*), possessive (Dr. Hellwig in *Schatten der Vergangenheit*), mistrustful (Van der Born in *Hannerl und ihre Liebhaber*), almost impotent and fetishist (Michael Thomas in *Man spricht über Jacqueline*), masochistic (Raucher in *Drei Unteroffiziere*). Their deep-rooted idiosyncrasies reflect their disturbed relationship to their surroundings; even when their behaviour is corrected, their image as human failures is never completely eradicated.

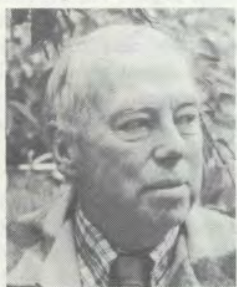
Nor do Hochbaum's women fit the National Socialist ideal in any respect. The Hochbaum woman is neither homemaker, patient wife nor incubator for the new nation. She challenges the male, promises him sexual enjoyment, and may even reverse conventional roles, developing a dominating position from which she pushes him into a passive, erotic play of the sexes. This battle of the sexes, of course, is developed within the limits of the morally allowed: permissiveness gives way to proper monogamy. But the moral conformity always arrives towards the end of the film, abruptly and sketchily motivated. The compromise was sufficient to keep the films out of the 'unfit for screening' category; but compared with the general run of films made between 1933 and 1945, Hochbaum's picture of the sexual relationship belongs to the category of 'decadent art' (*entartete Kunst*) reviled by the National Socialists.

In fact, Hochbaum's anti-heroes and anti-heroines appear as the purest and most interesting figures of a film epoch which promoted and applauded the petit bourgeois idyll, destroyed the individual and developed an image of the human being which was as ultimately sterile as it was immediately effective for propaganda purposes.

* The film was completed by R. A. Stemmler.

THE ELUSIVE

Photo: John G. S. Collier



John Collier

Tom Milne

'If thou be'st born to strange sights and if you don't mind picking your way through the untidy tropics of this, the globe, and this, the heart, in order to behold them, come with me into the highly coloured Bargain Basement Toy Bazaar of the Upper Congo. You shall return to England shortly.'—John Collier, 'His Monkey Wife'

After languishing in limbo since its appearance at the London Festival three years ago, James B. Harris' *Some Call It Loving* has just re-emerged as the other half of a London sexploitation double bill: a strange but perhaps not entirely inappropriate apotheosis for a film that assumes the persona of the Dream Factory to demonstrate the innocence of corruption as well as the corruptibility of innocence.

At the end of the film, determined to preserve the Sleeping Beauty he has rescued from a carnival and fallen chastely in love with from being contaminated by his own world-weary depravity, the hero salvages her purity—thereby restoring it, however, to the defilement of the sideshow, where admirers may try to wake her for a dollar a kiss—by re-administering the drug that kept her asleep. The John Collier story on which the film is based reaches a similar conclusion, but for simpler, sharper and altogether less metaphysical reasons.

Waiting patiently for his ideal to awaken after he has rescued her from captivity, the hero, an Englishman of means adequate to his simple but exquisitely cultivated tastes who has brought back this prize from a trip to America, at last sees his fragile beauty stir, bringing instant disillusion. "How do you do?" said Edward. "At least . . . I mean to say . . . I expect you wonder where you are." "Where I am, and how I goddam well got here," said his lovely guest, sitting up on the bed. She rubbed her brow, obviously trying hard to remember. "I must have passed right out," she said. And then, pointing at him accusingly: "And you look like a son of a bitch who'd take advantage of me."

Time was, if you remember, when Borges was not yet a cult writer, celebrated by mysterious references in films like *Paris Nous Appartient* and *Les Carabiniers*, largely ignored until, around the time of *Performance*, Borges was published or republished and at last read. So too, in a rather different way, with John Collier,

whose sizeable body of novels and short stories remained out of print and forgotten but whose name was kept tantalisingly alive by a series of distinguished adaptors. Hitchcock included two of his stories, 'Back for Christmas' and 'Wet Saturday', both personally directed, in his TV series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. Orson Welles, also for TV, adapted the story 'Youth from Vienna' as *Fountain of Youth* (see Joseph McBride's article in *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Winter 1971/72). Sandy Wilson made a charming musical out of Collier's equally charming first novel, *His Monkey Wife* (published in 1930). Stephen Sondheim, no less, did the music for a TV version of 'Evening Primrose', a pleasing fancy about a wraith-like tribe living in voluntary seclusion from the pressures of life in a New York department store, not unlike Giraudoux' *Madwoman of Chaillet* but given a note of chill horror by the presence of the Dark Men, a similar but unmentionably sinister (cannibalistic?) tribe who have chosen to live in a funeral parlour and who are called in to deal with inter-

lopers. And of course, in relatively recent cinema history, there was Collier's name among the credits for Franklin Schaffner's *The War Lord*, presumably accounting for the weird aura of magic and myth that infused a Hollywood historical romance.

Recently, a small oasis in the literary desert has appeared with the publication of *The John Collier Reader*,* an anthology containing forty-seven short stories, the whole of *His Monkey Wife* and, disappointingly, only two chapters of *Defy the Foul Fiend* (to my mind Collier's best novel, published in 1934 and certainly something of a key to him as both man and writer). Received with general enthusiasm only slightly tempered by the doubts normally reserved by reviewers for writers devoted to fantasy, this anthology has focused due attention on a writer described by Eric Korn in the *Times Literary Supplement* as 'a phenomenon, perhaps a cult, on his way to becoming an industry.' Published with no bibliographical information whatsoever, and with an introduction by Anthony Burgess that is critically perceptive but of little help informationally (and indeed introduces a new mystery by recalling that of Collier's connection with *The African Queen*), this volume has left most reviewers enthusing over John Collier (b. 1901, poet, novelist, short story writer and scriptwriter) but echoing *New Yorker* editor Harold Ross' celebrated 'Who he?'

JOHN COLLIER: 'I started off as a poet, kept going by a small allowance from my father, who was extremely poor. I helped keep him that way for nearly ten years, and finally managed to write a novel, *His Monkey Wife*, which was kindly received, and it led to my writing a good many short stories for the *New Yorker*.

* Souvenir Press, 1975. £5.00.

'I went to live in Cassis, a delightful little seaport near Marseilles. While there I fell in love with a sturdy fishing boat which was up for sale. At a low price, too, but more than I could beg or borrow. So I was walking around the port, casting languishing glances in that direction, when a nice little girl rode up on a bicycle and gave me a telegram. It was from my agent. Would I go to Hollywood on a two month writing job for wages that seemed to me princely, and which would buy the boat. I was off like a shot.'

'That was for *Sylvia Scarlett* . . . to join a couple of other writers on the screenplay. Unfortunately it didn't turn out as well as was hoped. It had all the elements of a really good film. Based on a lively book, a first-rate cast, and in Cukor an outstandingly brilliant director. Unfortunately, again, not a good script. In the main, my fault. It happened that I was abysmally ignorant of the cinema; I'd seen scarcely a dozen films in my life. I couldn't have had a better guide than Cukor, but I wasn't in the mood to learn. Frivolous and pigheaded at the same time: a combination not unknown among the lesser literary lights in England in the Thirties. What must have made it all the sadder for Cukor is that he'd asked for Evelyn Waugh. And I turned up instead . . . some confusion in the front office . . .'

Sylvia Scarlett (1935), though a flop at the time, is now of course something of a cult classic. In *On Cukor*, Gavin Lambert and Cukor discuss the film rather at cross purposes, with the interviewer wondering why 'there was such a terrific controversy over something very charming and very lightweight . . . a simple, mildly eccentric tale of a girl who disguises herself as a boy to help out her dear old father, who's a thief and a con man, and both men and women fall in love with him/her,' while Cukor isn't too sure whether or not he had thought it daring at the time. 'But then we got John Collier for the script, and he was a daring kind of writer, so I suppose I *must* have been thinking in that way.'

The common ground that Cukor and Lambert never quite reach is that Collier at his most characteristic is simultaneously disarming and daring, producing the effect that Anthony Burgess calls his *wickedness*, illustrating the point by quoting the closing lines of *His Monkey Wife*: a lyric celebration of romance finally consummated in which Collier delicately resurrects the fact, long buried under a filigree of emotional arabesques, that the happy Isolde melting into her Tristan's arms is, nevertheless, a chimpanzee. 'Under her long and scanty hair, he caught glimpses of a plum-blue skin. Into the depths of those all-dark lustrous eyes, his spirit slid with no sound of a splash. She uttered a few low words, rapidly, in her native tongue. The candle, guttering beside the bed, was strangled in the grasp of a prehensile foot, and darkness received, like a ripple in velvet, the final happy sigh.'

Wryly commenting on the experience of *Sylvia Scarlett*, Cukor notes that 'the picture did something to me. It slowed me up. I wasn't going to be so goddamned daring after that.' Collier, like so many writers who tangled with the Hollywood machine, from Fitzgerald to Nathanael West, found the experience a rich source



Cary Grant, Katharine Hepburn, Edmund Gwenn in '*Sylvia Scarlett*'; below: Maurice Evans, Rosemary Forsyth in '*The War Lord*'



Below: Carol White, Veronica Anderson in '*Some Call It Loving*'



for satire. His most barbed story is 'Pictures in the Fire', a morality brilliantly worked out in strict movie terms, in which a writer who sells his soul to the Devil (in town to become a movie mogul and revolutionise Hollywood) for a tempting contract, wins it back by encouraging the latter's casting-couch sweetie to play the ever more outrageously demanding star. Everything is dipped in vintage Hollywood vitriol, from artistic humiliation ('But,' said she, 'do you think I ought to be seen about with a writer?') to private revenge in the scriptwriter's rewrite of *Romeo and Juliet*: 'O.K. We'll modernise it. The Capulet apartment is in a New York skyscraper. Romeo's a young G-Man, from Harvard, but disguised as a Yale man in order to outwit the gangsters. Capulet's Harvard, you see. It builds for a reconciliation, a happy ending. Romeo's keen on mountain climbing; that builds up for the balcony scene. On a skyscraper, you see. Only his name's not Romeo. It's Don.'

Nevertheless, Collier remained in Hollywood, receiving screen credit for a very mixed bag of films* and obviously developing a kind of quizzical affection for the place. His attitude is reflected, probably much more accurately than in 'Pictures in the Fire', by the brilliantly funny but oddly affecting story 'Gavin O'Leary', about a flea who becomes smitten with the charms of movie queen Blynda Blythe after sampling the blood of a star-struck poet in a cinema. Itch-hiking the three thousand miles from Vermont to Hollywood, he negotiates the delicate problem of making his heroine's acquaintance by becoming her co-star in a doss-house sequence where the actress is to be subjected to total naturalism and real fleas. From there, becoming a star himself and taking up residence in mutual admiration with a narcissistic leading man, Gavin's story (leading to his final regeneration) is an hallucinating tangle of realism and fantasy viewed through the extravagant distorting mirrors of the Dream Factory: 'It was not long before ugly rumours were in circulation concerning the flea star. People whispered of his fantastic costumes, his violet evening suits, his epicene underwear, his scent-spray shower-bath, and of strange parties at his bijou house in Bel Air. A trade paper, naming no names, pointed out that if individuals of a certain stripe were considered bad security risks by the State Department, they must be even more of a danger in the most influential of all American industries. It seemed only a matter of time before Gavin would be the centre of an open scandal, and his pictures picketed by the guardians of our morals.'

'I was extremely lucky in the friends I made and in some of the jobs I was given. Not all of them, of course. Maybe half were impossible. There's a deplorable propensity in the film industry there, here and everywhere, to latch on to basic material which has an inbuilt hopelessness. It's up to a writer to have nothing to do with such stuff. There were times when I was too timid or too greedy to turn my back on an offer, and

I very justly got stuck. Some of the other jobs were as good as I could make them. When at last I learned a bit.

'I was given an excellent chance after Sylvia Scarlett. Charles Laughton, then at his peak with Captain Bligh, had a great desire to play a London bobby. Thalberg hired me to write an original story and screenplay. It was one of the great plums, fallen into my mouth. But it happened that while I was still fumbling with the first draft, Laughton left for England to do *Rembrandt* for Korda. And at the same time Korda offered me *Elephant Boy* with Flaherty directing. Thalberg, who could be magnificently kind, allowed me to take a leave of absence. But, while I was still in England, poor Thalberg died. And, as with earlier potentates, his slaves were given the job of escorting him to the next world, on a one-way ticket. In my case, the next world was India.

'I had presented myself at the studio for *Elephant Boy* and was politely asked to wait a little. Bob Flaherty had been in India for eighteen months past, and would soon be

'So we went off to the Hungaria Restaurant, and scribbles were made on the interior parts of Player's cigarette packets. I think the exteriors carried no sort of warning. Anyway, a sort of jury-script was tacked together, much in the way that shipwrecked sailors rig out their rafts with whatever petticoats and spars may be bobbing around. Sabu was sent for, and arrived. In the interval the engaging little imp had exercised his constitutional right to grow into a plump and amiable lubber at least twenty pounds heavier and twelve inches taller than the diminutive pixie he had been when Flaherty first photographed him with his gigantic charge, Kala Nag. In the whole eighteen months the slow-living pachyderm had not grown an inch. There was a scene where he had to lift Sabu high in the air with his trunk. I dreaded a visit from an inspector of the R.S.P.C.A.

'My long education as a scriptwriter may have begun to pay off, I think, about ten years later when I read C. S. Forrester's *The African Queen*. I wrote an enthusiastic note



Dennie Moore, Edmund Gwenn, Katharine Hepburn in 'Sylvia Scarlett'

coming home. He had been delayed a while owing to the fact that they'd sent him off to India to make a film on the Kipling story without giving him a script. After all, a script has an end, often the best part of it. Without a script, Flaherty could not reach that end. He therefore continued to make the most superb photographs of India, of the most ravishing temples, the most heavenly skies and particularly the most elephantine elephants, some of which were going to the right; others to the left; others seeming to charge directly at the audience. It was said that there were three hundred thousand feet of these superb photographs, and Alexander Korda cried out in mortal pain.

'I diffidently suggested that it might more or less save the situation if we got the child Sabu over from India and if we devised some brief and simple scenes, in which he might utter a few words, and perhaps be intercut against an advancing elephant bent on destruction and, holding up his hand like a juvenile traffic cop, soon be connected with one of the shots of a hinder view—there were a great many to choose from—and he would thus appear to have saved the village. "Mr. Collier, you ask twenty-nine impossibilities."

to Jack Warner, and persuaded him to buy the novel and to let me write the screenplay. All that was necessary was to transpose the book into the conventional script form. But when I had done the first draft, Warner, who had neglected to read the book, was told that it was concerned with two people all alone on a little riverboat, and that it would cost nearly three million dollars to make. Some ill-disposed person whispered to him that the script had been written with Bette Davis in mind, and that she was disposed to play the part. I'm told that he was reminded also that Miss Davis had the right to pre-empt the feminine lead in any property produced by the studio. Choler prompted him to get rid of me, an impulse he responded to with such alacrity that Reason had not the time to get a word in edgeways. When at last its small still voice could make itself heard, it advised him to get rid of the script also, lest Miss Davis exercise her right. So he sold it to me for a song, and I sold it to Sam Spiegel for the equivalent of a grand opera, and he passed it on to John Huston, who made an immensely popular film out of it.

'I did only the first draft, but the end was different. Since you ask, my version did not

* *Elephant Boy* (Zoltan Korda/Robert Flaherty, 1937); *Her Cardboard Lover* (Cukor, 1942); *Deception* (Irving Rapper, 1946); *Roseanna McCoy* (Irving Reis, 1949); *The Story of Three Loves* (Gottfried Reinhardt/Vincente Minnelli, 1953); *I Am a Camera* (Henry Cornelius, 1955); *The War Lord* (Franklin Schaffner, 1965).

contain the marriage scene. You'll remember that Allnut and Rose have lashed two cylinders full of explosive to the bows of the Queen, thus transforming her into a super torpedo. They lie hidden in the reeds until the German gunboat comes along in the gathering darkness. Then they set out to ram her and blow her and the Queen and themselves out of the water. But a wind has sprung up and the open lake has waves on it, and they ship so much water that before they reach the gunboat the poor old Queen sinks by the stern, leaving them floundering in three feet of water. The makeshift torpedoes are sticking up just level with the surface. Rose and Allnut attract the Germans' attention with shouts in English. The gunboat trains a searchlight on them and steams inshore in pursuit, lured on to a course which is going to bring it right down upon the waiting torpedoes. Rose and Allnut renew their shouts to keep it following. A machine gun opens up. They are likely to be cut to pieces. At that moment the gunboat goes

interview which living composers should be admired, replies: 'Let's see. Stravinsky when I think of the present. Richard Strauss when I think of the past. And of course Hollenius, who combines the rhythm of today with the melody of yesterday.' In point of fact, the only thing wrong with the line is that it is used within the context of a glossy magazine, romantic tosh view of art and artists.

As a writer, Collier has a quality all his own. At its root is a certain gentlemanly, world-weary cynicism, allied to an eighteenth century elegance of wit and a metaphysical's fondness for whimsical conceits: 'Lord Ollebeare had a face like a coat of arms. His nose might have been a fist, clenched and mailed, gules. In fact, he was one of those men you sometimes see in the street. His moustaches were two dolphins argent, his eyes two étoiles azur. He had also an inalienable two hundred a year, paid weekly, a top bed-sitting-room with a good toasting fire to it, six Norman names, a ruined house, a wild park, and one large

He on his part will view all progressive notions with increasing distrust, as his reactionary programme forces his wife to raise them as the standard of her independence.'

'Well, I was certainly influenced by Sterne, and by Smollett and Fielding, who were my greatest pleasure as a boy. Later, as I became more and more involved in field sports and taproom company, I found that the racy, slangy style of Surtees provided me with all the lingo I needed to express the narrowness of my views and the intensity of my pleasures. After half a lifetime, I still blush when I remember the enjoyment I felt in slaughtering harmless beasts and birds. How one could have lived so stupidly and yet in a perpetual intoxication with the most vivid beauty is something I shall everlastingly wonder at. I might wonder even more at some of the opinions I held in those days, but of those the less said the better.'

Around that time (1933, in fact), Collier wrote a sort of declaration of faith: 'I cannot see much good in the world or much likelihood of good. There seems to me a definite bias in human nature towards ill, towards the immediate convenience, the ugly, the cheap . . . I rub my hands and say "Hurry up, you foulers of a good world, and destroy yourselves faster."' The cynical disenchantment expressed here informs most of Collier's writing, but governs only the more conventional short stories, including the two selected by Hitchcock: diabolical murder plots conceived by resentful husbands and spiteful wives who observe the utmost social aplomb in the niceties of their strategy, and who are suavely brought to book by neat O. Henry twists, whether internal (both husband and wife execute the same successful plan simultaneously in 'Over Insurance') or external (the dead and buried wife in 'Back for Christmas' had previously arranged repairs to the cellar as a surprise for her husband). Mildred Natwick, blithely chirruping 'What seems to be the trouble, Captain?' as she stumbles upon Edmund Gwenn dragging a corpse about by the heels in *The Trouble with Harry*, is so quintessentially a Collier character that it is surprising as well as sad that Hitchcock—not to say Hollywood—never made more use of Collier as scriptwriter or source.

But Collier, of course, could be much subtler and more disorientating. The magnificent 'Are You Too Late or Was I Too Early?', conceived entirely as a subjective narrative, is the haunting love story of a man for the mysterious ghostly woman who appears, tantalisingly, in his flat as a Crusoe footprint, a breath dimming the mirror, a scented breeze in passing, until an overheard telephone conversation takes us through another looking-glass: 'I heard, in a full opening of the sense, the delicate intake of her breath, the very sound of the parting of her lips. She was about to speak again. Each syllable was as clear as a bell. She said, "Oh, it's perfect. It's so quiet for Harry's work. Guess how we were lucky enough to get it! The previous tenant was found dead in his chair, and they actually say it's haunted."'

The nightmares of the imagination discovered by Poe are never very far away in Collier's stories, where a sculptor seeking success as a ventriloquist creates a dummy



The romantic tosh view of art: Bette Davis, Claude Rains in 'Deception'

up in a sheet of flame and the lake is clear for the British.

'Rose and Allnut struggle to the beach and fall on the warm soil, dead beat. When they wake, the sun is just rising. For mile after mile to the south, the lake shore is scalloped with beaches leading down to the open country now held by the British. They walk on down and the shore birds rise in front of them as they go. A happy end? Bet your life it was. I had a very comfortable percentage, and, believe it or not, I was paid every penny that was due to me.'

Of his own screenwriting efforts, at least up to the aborted *African Queen*, Collier has little that is complimentary to say: 'I suspect that what I wrote was far too wordy and far too literary; and most of those highly polished MGM pictures were too full of glossy magazine thinking.' One might perhaps cite as an example the line in *Deception*—pianist Bette Davis torn between composer Hollenius (Claude Rains) and cellist Novak (Paul Henreid)—pounced upon by Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg (writing in *Hollywood in the Forties*) to support a description of Collier's script as 'very pretentious'. The cellist, asked in an

and barren farm . . . Twenty-odd years ago, for we must hark back a little, he had had less nose, more money, much credit, and the best suite in Albany. There he had a charming cook, on whom, in the most careless fashion imaginable, he begot the hero of this story.'

What follows (this is the beginning of *Defy the Foul Fiend*), combining the manner of Sterne with that of Diderot, is the sentimental education of the well-born byblow in the ways of a world teetering on the verge of vulgar modernity. Like the hero of Ford Madox Ford's Tietjens tetralogy, young Willoughby Ollebeare is a Tory so pure that he is also the perfect radical; and when his heart is doubly broken by the pretty girl and the native land he simultaneously falls in love with, the twin reconciliations are a Pyrrhic victory in which Willoughby is left to face solitude as the last English country squire: 'Taking two people, of equal generosity of spirit, each of a courageous and sincere intelligence, each of that order which ardently desires to live, and is scornful of living without a faith, it is more likely than not that the woman will be a Liberal, and it is quite certain that she will be all the more so, if the man happens to be a Tory.

so lifelike that it assumes his life ('Spring Fever'); a lovelorn young man conceives the notion of having himself stuffed and placed in his beloved's presence as an eternal reproach ('Squirrels Have Bright Eyes'); a stuffy father ordering his small son to banish an imaginary playmate called Mr. Beelzy is himself mysteriously consumed ('Thus I Refute Beelzy'). In these stories, however, Collier invariably sets out from reality: from the psychological inadequacies and emotional disturbances that lead to strange fancies. The Devil, for instance, might be said to have taken a hand at the end of 'Thus I Refute Beelzy'; more particularly, however, the child has simply turned at last on the father determined to mould him into a replica of his pedestrian self. While the sculptor-ventriloquist is merely the victim of the *reductio ad absurdum* outcome of his self-imposed, stubbornly blinkered and Sisyphean task of persuading a society fed on Brancusi, Lipchitz and Brzeska that representation is the only purpose and justification of art.

Despite the profusion of devils in his work, Hell, for Collier, is essentially of our own making. Yet even as he excoriates the world for its follies, Collier is clearly increasingly preoccupied by—and sympathetic to—the human predicament expressed by his collection of lonely castaways yearning for a little romance, a little tenderness and a little understanding. Oddly, but again not inappropriately, the man who hungered for the world to destroy itself more rapidly, and spent his days killing harmless beasts and birds, covertly expresses his new concern by way of the amazing collection of animals who proliferate in his stories, sometimes as mute (or not so mute) witnesses to human destructiveness, but more often as surrogates for the unrealised aspirations.

One of his most haunting stories is 'The Steel Cat', about a man who evolves an idea for a Heath Robinson mousetrap after saving a mouse from drowning in his bath. Proudly aided by the rescued mouse, now his friend and still unable to swim, the inventor demonstrates his invention to a tycoon in the hope of a lucrative contract. His interest taken less by the Steel Cat than by the demonstration mouse, the tycoon nibbles and insists on signing an immediate contract; meanwhile, as the distraught inventor hesitates to risk a fortune by interrupting the busy tycoon's tight schedule, his friend slowly drowns. And somehow this death of a mouse reverberates with the clear bell-notes of tragedy. The richer and riper Collier revealed in such stories spent most of Hollywood's blacklist years in Mexico City: not exactly blacklisted, more a voluntary exile in a place he loved from what he calls 'a sort of greylisting'.

'There were reasons for this greylisting. Some were comic reasons. One is that I had a distinguished namesake in John Collier, the Commissioner for Indian Affairs, and he made several speeches at an organisation which Roosevelt had asked should be set up to get writers to do things for the war effort in 1944-45, and which continued afterwards with some strong political coloration. Whatever he did, I got the credit or debit for, and I expect he got some from me. I went to dine with Henry Wallace when he was running for President. Also, I was

strongly on the side of the 'Communists' who were attacked, the first ones to be singled out. Several of them were personal friends. I was a sympathiser, let's say, with nine-tenths of their ideas, but I wasn't very much involved until the persecutions began, which made me rather hot under the collar, and I was concerned with getting some facts out to papers round the world.'

It was Henry Cornelius, ignoring the blacklist, who brought Collier back to England to script *I Am a Camera*, a film which Collier now agrees would have been much better had he approached Isherwood's stories from the narrative standpoint adopted by Welles in *Fountain of Youth*, and which he had himself envisaged at around the same time for an abortive TV project: a collection of his own stories to be presented by Robert Morley as dreams of his in which he would be interlocutor, sometimes star, and sometimes an obscure character. Since then Collier has written two scripts, one realised and one not.

'I certainly wasn't responsible for everything in *The War Lord*, but it was I who tried to introduce what you call the magical-Druidical element. Leslie Stevens' play was set much later, in the thirteenth century, I think. I put it back to the eleventh century. The invasion of the Low Countries by the Catholic Church was late, and at that time the inhabitants were still following, more or less, the old neolithic, animistic religion. What interested me was the effect on the invader of this primitive element. In those days, of course, one was thinking of the fate of the little lieutenant in Indo-China, a Frenchman stuck up in North Vietnam with his platoon, holding a losing outpost. I thought it might be interesting to make a parallel.

'I admit that I felt very bothered when I found that the script had been changed into someone's quite extraordinary idea of what a successful costume picture should be. Another unfortunate writer became involved, quite a respectable one, Millard Kaufman. It seems that someone else put in all sorts of atrocities like "I hate your knightly guts" etc. At the time, I felt somewhat aggrieved at Charlton Heston for having failed to prevent the spoilage, but later I realised that it was exactly the sort of thing I should have expected.'

Collier's other script, published in 1973 as *Milton's Paradise Lost: A Screenplay for the Cinema of the Mind*, is a vast and visionary attempt not simply to stage Milton, but to interpret his account of the fall of Lucifer in subversive terms that delve further into the nebulous zones explored in *The War Lord*. In the preface to the script, for instance, Collier notes the anomaly whereby Satan and his followers are doomed to torture without end, yet soon contrive to extricate themselves, restored to their former personal glory and purpose, from the lake of hellfire. 'Luckily Milton, after setting down this explanation [the prisoner was paroled in order that he might commit fresh crimes and incur a yet heavier sentence], shows us, without naming it, a more likely and a more tolerable one. He shows us the effects of a force that originated in Hell and that has been used on earth, in Heaven's despite, throughout the ages. Frazer could have named it; it is magic.

See how Pandemonium, that fairy palace, rose out of the sulphurous, burned-out soil: *It rose like an exhalation, with the sound of dulcet symphonies, and voices sweet*. What better demonstration could we have of the operation of the magic power? And what better formula than Satan's other great dictum, more profound than the first: *The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.*'

Opening new perspectives and inviting new techniques by its deployment of this Luciferian formula, Collier's *Paradise Lost* screenplay still awaits a director.

'No, the *Paradise Lost* screenplay wasn't exactly a commission. I had the idea of doing it, scribbled a few pages saying how I saw it, and sent them off to Howard Houseman, who is a great agent and a great arranger. He at once interested a producer, Martin Poll, who sent me a letter full of promises, some of which were kept. I got an advance of some sort and got busy. When it was finished, the producer was unable to raise the backing that he had hoped for. I got it back from him after a while, and now I have it.

'All sorts of enthusiastic people have advanced it in various quarters. At one time I thought that Fellini had agreed to do it; United Artists were willing to make the picture if he would do it. But although I believe, from the reports I got at second hand, he liked the general theme very much, he found there was a difficulty with the English language. Also, he was apparently in love with a Casanova project he had on hand. Since then I've not been able to find the sort of director whom I'd hoped would do it. It's been shown to four or five who might have handled it very well, but none of them were quite willing to go out on a limb for it. Why should they? Usually the ten million dollars has been the obstacle, though laboratory technicians assure me that electronic advances mean that there is no real need for such a vast budget.

'Recently, things have been thickening up concerning a possible production as a theatre piece. Extraordinary things can be done in theatres without immense cost, as long as one doesn't try to have real water in the canals or real fire in Hell. Old-fashioned classical realism and high polish would ruin the thing anyway. I think that the theme of *Paradise Lost* is singularly suited to attract the wide audience, and especially the young audience, of today. It is quasi-religious, quasi-scientific, and deeply humanistic, being the thrilling story, with which we can all identify, of how innocent, vegetarian, Proconsul or Pithecanthropus was caught up in the guerrilla war waged by Satan against the authoritarian dictatorship which orders the universe, and how he emerged as moral and immoral, curious, inspired, murderous and suffering Man.

'What I should like to offer them is a big, rough, ostensibly slapdash production, dazzling with light effects, deafening with sound and sometimes enchanting with music, and above all bursting with energy so that it breaks out of the conventional frame of proscenium and footlights and often out of the frame of conventional dramatic form. Imagination rather than money is the solvent to my problem. But so few people have enough of either.'



GANCE'S BEETHOVEN

James M. Welsh and Steven Kramer

Abel Gance's *Beethoven* (1937) takes one into the realm of romanticised biography. More precisely, it is idealised biography, whereby certain tendencies and attitudes are simplified and crystallised into what can be intelligently treated in a feature-length film. Gance's attitude towards the composer is summarised at the beginning of his film: 'The son of a drunken father and a servant-girl mother, Beethoven soared from his environment to become the great liberator of music. At the crest of his career, tragedies which might have quenched the fire in lesser men served only to fuel his boundless genius. In his youth, Beethoven was notorious for his ribaldry, his lusts and his loves. But only two passions did he remain faithful to until the end—his music and his love for Juliette ...'

Gance is not concerned here with absolute historical or biographical accuracy. Beethoven's love life, for example, is conveniently simplified. Gance suggests that there were two women in his life—Giulietta Giucardi (Juliette, with whom there was an admitted affair) and Therese von Brunswick. And what is suggested about these affairs is made certain in Gance's schematised treatment, which more or less followed biographical speculation up to the time the film was made. The 'immortal beloved' letter serves as a convenient case in point. Beethoven's

biographers had not agreed upon when, or even to whom, this letter was written. Gance seems to follow Schindler, the first biographer, who dates the letter to 1806 and names Juliette as the recipient. Thayer's *Life of Beethoven* agrees with the year 1806 but claims the letter was intended for Therese von Brunswick. That Gance shows the letter being intended for the one woman but accepted by the other seems to effect a sort of artistic compromise.

One cannot criticise Gance, however, for not being scrupulously pedantic. In all his films the paraphrasable content is secondary to the visual treatment, for it is the latter that informs the whole and gives it substance. There may well be a temperamental fidelity that is even more important than these doubtful matters of fact. Rather than striving for a positivist inventory of raw

facts, Gance searches for the meaning of Beethoven's life; and for him, this is meaning in more than an individual sense. Like Napoleon, Beethoven is portrayed as a kind of World Historical Individual, the Great Man in Hegelian terms, whose task it is to force material reality towards some higher expression of the spirit. Gance's Beethoven is a prisoner of this reality; he must come to terms with the exigencies of daily life, and he is not very adept at it. The uneasy co-existence of the two Beethovens is translated in the film into a continual tension. The viewer is often irritated by melodrama and bathos following scenes of great elevation. Even so, Gance can only be blamed for rendering too faithfully the essential paradox of the man. In the words of Romain Rolland (*Beethoven the Creator*), which Gance uses as a sort of prologue: 'Beethoven would not be Beethoven if he were not *too much* of whatever he was ... Whoever would understand him must be able to embrace the excess of his contrasts ...'

Gance's concern with the composer goes back at least two decades before *Beethoven*. In *La Dixième Symphonie* (1918) he had tried to break free of melodramatic structures, but his attempt to transform and elevate the spirit of artistic creation failed because of the limitations of his dramatic framework. One of his protagonists, a composer immersed in Beethoven's music, performs a symphony on the piano. As he does so, he becomes Beethoven; his symphony in effect becomes the 'tenth symphony' which Beethoven did not survive to write. Which seems to indicate that for Gance Beethoven represents more than a composer who lived from 1770 to 1827, but rather the essence of the spirit of music.

Gance's conception was surely influenced by his friend and colleague Ricciotto Canudo, author of the 'Manifesto of the Seven Arts' and the first aesthetician of film. In his *Book of Evolution: Man. Musical Psychology of Civilisation* (1907), Canudo had written of Beethoven: 'Human and natural rhythm found through him their absolute cadences. The aspiration to the divine made itself music.' As a filmmaker, Gance saw his role as that of an artist who paints with light or, metaphorically, a musician who composes in light. Early in his book *Prism* (1930), Gance states: 'For new songs a new lyre is needed, said Zarathustra. Will the cinema be that new lyre with strings of light?' Later, he pursues the idea further: 'I must give myself up to the artistic study of coloured vibrations. It is the music of the future, until infra-red and ultra-violet vibrations are discovered for us. But with what money, my God, shall I make this clavier on which to play light?' With these connotations of light in mind, Gance must have been moved by Canudo's words on Beethoven: 'In Beethoven resides truly that effort of matter to vibrate in light, which enchanted the paradisaical dream of Dante absorbed in his God; the state which the Christians call Paradise.' Gance's *Beethoven* is a visual demonstration of Canudo's theorising and speculation about the composer: 'In each of his harmonies, a voice of essential things was liberated, rose up, became light. For music represents the maximum of vibrations of matter before it becomes light.'

This article, discussing one of Abel Gance's lesser known films of the 1930s, on the characteristic theme of artistic destiny, is an edited chapter from a projected book on Gance.

Beethoven was made in 1937. What is particularly interesting about the way it was made is that it offered a unique opportunity for the pioneering director to return to the spirit and the techniques of silent cinema, and to use sound expressionistically. The film is a veritable symphony of images and music, and for the most part the images of Gance are equal on their own terms to the music of Beethoven. Here we have a masterful artist of the silent cinema making a film about an artist whose art depends upon sound and whose life is destined to end in deafness. What goes through the emotionally charged mind subjected to such a crisis? Gance attempts to show us a visualisation of the crisis in an extended montage sequence whose impact can compare with such sequences as the Odessa Steps in *Potemkin*.

We first see Beethoven in the mill at Heiligenstadt and we hear what he hears—the distorted and warped sound of bells (which calls to mind the torment of the bells of St. Stephen's Cathedral that announced Juliette's wedding in the previous sequence). Beethoven's companion, a boy (Theo), hears nothing; and when the camera cuts to Theo in close-up we too hear nothing. Beethoven rushes to the piano and beats it desperately with his fists. We see this but, like the sufferer, we hear nothing. Beethoven then leaves the mill and goes for a walk in the forest. He sees familiar sights—a gypsy playing a violin, birds singing, a blacksmith at his anvil, women washing clothes at the river—but he hears nothing. Whenever Beethoven is in the frame, we hear exactly what he hears: nothing.

The images here appear in rapid succession and establish a distinct visual rhythm (punctuated, for example, by one-frame flashes of the blacksmith's hammer striking the hot iron). This is followed by a visual caesura, the camera holding on Beethoven's contemplative face. While this shot is held, Gance gives us an aural reflection of what passes through the composer's mind as he 'hears' in his memory the sounds that he can no longer perceive. The visual montage gives way momentarily to aural montage, just as synaesthesia will soon give way to synthesis as these remembered sounds are transformed into the Pastoral Symphony. And as Beethoven begins to 'hear' the Symphony, Gance shows us reflections of the life force in nature, leaves quivering in the wind, a pulsating urge. The images visualise an idea expressed by Wordsworth in 'Tintern Abbey': 'A motion and a spirit, that impels/ All thinking things, all objects of all thought/ And rolls through all things...' Here one senses what Gance's colleague Jean Epstein meant when he said that the nature of film is to be theogenic.

At the end of his walk, Beethoven stands by a river in a moment of existential crisis, his face reflected in the water like a death mask. The reflection is disturbed and rippled by the movement of the water. His communion with nature gives him solace; but as the images pass before his mind and he is able to hear the sounds associated with them, he realises that he is not really deaf. A world of sounds still exists within him, and he is saved from the immediate temptation of suicide.

Beethoven the man has survived, but Beethoven the creator has not yet asserted



Schuppanzigh and Beethoven (Harry Baur): Gance's uncertain comic touch

himself. The capacity for creation exists; and a dramatised emblem of inspiration is provided in the following storm scene (which takes place some six months later). He hears the thunder and becomes one with its force: 'I'll speak with thunder,' he asserts, shaking his fist at the storm clouds. In lesser hands than Gance's the image would be almost ludicrous, as genius and what appears to be madness coincide in the act of creation. There is almost a dialectic relationship between Beethoven and the storm: the storm unleashes his power, but thereafter the controlling hand of the artist shapes the raw force into musical creation. Beethoven's hands on the keyboard, Gance suggests through his images, can produce lightning and thunder.

Gance's treatment of genius as akin to madness has a distinctly Romantic quality—the notion of the artist incompatible with the sensibilities of bourgeois society. The idea of *furor poeticus*, the possession of the poet by the Muse, was a common theme of the Renaissance and goes back to antiquity. The materialist world view of the seventeenth century reduced the artist's role to a merely biographical one: he expressed his personal feelings or reflected his environment. Gance's portrayal of the artist—like his portrayal of the hero in general—is a manifesto against such a limited view of the Great Man.

In the two sequences just described, *Beethoven* reaches its summit. One of the film's problems, as we have suggested, is one of the problems of Beethoven himself: his idiosyncrasy. At his peril, Gance attempts to show this side of Beethoven's personality early in the film, when in a fit of pique the composer throws an egg at his servant, hitting instead his comic sidekick Ignaz Schuppanzigh (a character based on reality, but manipulated by Gance for theatrical and comic purposes). Through Schuppanzigh, Gance shows us life at another, everyday level. There are perhaps too many examples of such low humour in the film, as when Schuppanzigh eats a chocolate violin—the only case, as he lamely points out, where 'music feeds its creator'. Gance's humour has not been universally admired, even by his friends. Canudo remarked, for instance, that Gance's comic sequences are 'of such quality that for several minutes all the films in which they take place are lamentably vulgarised.'

The film also shows Beethoven as a man given to anger. His temper explodes after he has brooded over the news that Juliette is to marry Count Gallenberg. He bribes

the cathedral organist and barricades himself in the organ loft; and instead of a wedding march he plays the funeral march from one of his piano sonatas. To build dramatic and film tension, Gance keeps his camera in the cavernous nave of the cathedral while his visuals are overpowered by the thundering chords of the dolorous organ. We see reaction shots of faces that reflect Juliette's comment, 'What strange music!' before, finally, Gance gives us a glimpse of the scowling artist, hidden in his loft. This sequence is in agreement, however, with Thayer's characterisation of Giulietta's father, who objected to his daughter marrying a man 'of character and temperament so peculiar, and afflicted with the incipient stages of an infirmity which, if not arrested and cured, must deprive him of all hope of obtaining any high and remunerative appointment...'

Gance seems to believe that Beethoven can only create pure music by becoming deaf. This idea parallels a scenario, recorded in *Prism*, which he had created many years before about Homer. Homer had wanted to write epic poems while living a life of luxury; he wanted to describe things more beautiful than those he saw, or could see. Finally, he realised that the Light was jealous of his interior vision: 'He goes one morning to try to wrest the secret of Light in order to be able definitively to do without it. He clearly feels that without that knowledge his own world can be extinguished. Like Prometheus stealing fire, he wants to seize from the sun the secret of its light... He stares at it for hours and finally the great truth of *living light* is unveiled before him: his eyes are consumed... He is blind. From that instant on, he can build his dream greater than reality. He can begin the *Iliad*.'

So with Beethoven. Only after his ears have become deaf to the sounds of this world can he hear the pure sounds that become the materials for his art. Gance's theory, also expressed in *Prism*, is that the human organ can become fatigued from an excess either of internal or of external sensation. An excess of outside noises can make the ear weary, but the musical imagination of the artist taxes the inner ear in a way that can also be destructive, just as too powerful a vision of light can burn out the eyes of the poet. ('Since Homer, how many great visionaries have paid this strange tribute of weariness of the internal sense?') Gance and Romain Rolland share this view of Beethoven's deafness as inextricably related to his destiny. Rolland suggests that there is a peculiarly tragic process at work here, tending towards an end that is 'tragic in a different way from everything that this glorious misfortune has suggested to our imagination and our pity: the cause of the misfortune was in Beethoven, *was* Beethoven. It was inscribed in his nature from the beginning...'

Gance also hints that there is a relationship between Beethoven's deafness and the failure of his affair with Juliette. When she tells him that she is in love with Gallenberg, the composer says, 'I misunderstand. Repeat the last sentence.' It is when he hears the wedding bells that Beethoven is crazed, runs off to the church and furiously plays the funeral march. Is it coincidental

that when his deafness becomes fully manifest at Heiligenstadt, it is accompanied by a ringing sound like that of church bells? The deafness would seem to be, at least in part, a defence mechanism against pain.

To our knowledge, only one badly butchered and deteriorating 16 mm print of *Beethoven* now exists in the United States*. The print is fragmented: some sequences are missing, others are out of order. Since part of the film is missing, the final death montage, which simultaneously recalls through parallel editing the composer's dying thoughts and a performance of his music, appears as something of a puzzle. This truncated print is little more, however, than a shadow of a shadow. For last-minute production decisions eliminated key sequences from the original release version. In the final montage, consequently, one finds brief shots which refer to at least one earlier sequence that no longer exists. When asked about this and related problems (in July 1974), M. Gance answered:

'That scene must be related to a very beautiful scene which you didn't see, which was cut by those Ostrogoths who are involved in cinema, those idiots. The first scene of *Beethoven* showed a canal of the town where Beethoven was living. One sees a man a little tired who passes and who hears cries and sobs from a house whose shutters are closed. He stops; he opens the door; he sees a woman near a bed who weeps for a little dead daughter. You didn't see the scene? She sobs, she sobs . . . There is a piano in the salon. He goes to the piano and he plays the 'Pathétique'. And one sees the woman. She doesn't know that it's music. But her face changes, changes, grows softer, as if she thought that her daughter rose up at the end of the music. That sorrow had made her almost a corpse herself; it now has a means of escape to the hereafter. And then she turns around and sees Beethoven, who closes the piano. She gestures 'Thank you' and leaves. That was a magnificent, heart-rending scene . . .

'In any case, Beethoven dies with the clenched fist—'let the earth weep over me'—almost cursing the heavens. His exact words. I tried to respect truth as far as possible. But that's nothing. For me it's a little detail. What's important is the totality of a great work. You make a cathedral, fine; there are always very beautiful statues and excellent stained glass windows in that cathedral, that's understood, but that comes after. You must build the cathedral. I have two cathedrals to build: *Christopher Columbus*, which would be a real cathedral of cinema, and *Ecce Homo*.

' . . . I was influenced by the sorrow of Beethoven. I feel close to men who have suffered much in their lives. I understand them very well; I share their suffering. There is another very beautiful scene which you didn't see, which was taken out. Beethoven was in a sort of café with Schubert. Since Beethoven doesn't hear, Schubert writes something in his conversation book—I don't remember what. Beethoven says to him, 'Let's go, then.' 'Where?' 'To his tomb.' 'Whose tomb?' 'The tomb of Mozart.' 'Yes, Mr. Beethoven.' During

that period there was a machine, the kind that was used at fairs, with big notched discs. It gave a stupid, ridiculous sound, not a magnetic but a physical sound that was really unbearable. One hears this horrible music during this very beautiful scene in which they cannot make themselves understood and when they decide to go to Mozart's tomb. The scene of Mozart's tomb no longer exists. Beethoven wants to speak; Schubert wants to speak; then Beethoven says, 'Shh,' and one hears (Gance hums Cherubino's first aria from *The Marriage of Figaro*), as if Mozart wanted to speak with them. Schubert has tears in his eyes, and they go. Nothing else, not a word. . .

'I repeat: all that interests me in the cinema is when I give something moving. I share the distress and the sorrow of the great man who was unappreciated by his time. For me it's sorrowful to think that life passed by such men as Beethoven, Dante, Michelangelo, Mozart and the rest, without understanding their true value. I don't pardon life for that, but I would like men to understand that they were wrong not to understand . . . As Nietzsche said: "The point of wisdom is always turned against the wise man." Why? The great men have always felt the point of wisdom, maybe because they wanted to go too far on the road of sensibility, to explore too far, and life brings them back. The world is filled with vulgarity . . . Afterwards, they are given statues, concerts, people can't speak enough of them. But they die unhappy—the clenched fist of the dying Beethoven. That overwhelms me . . . Columbus, that's the same thing; he was a great man, a veritable Don Quixote, an *illuminé* who transformed everything.'

One valid criticism of *Beethoven* is the film's willingness to alter the facts of Beethoven's life when they do not fit in with Gance's preconceived ideas about the fate of the tragic hero. For Gance, the tragic hero is necessarily misunderstood by his time, and suffers the indignities of poverty and in-

comprehension. Towards the end of *Beethoven*, we see the composer in just such a condition. His publisher tells him that no one wants to buy his music, that Rossini is now the rage. At that very moment, the adulated Rossini enters, and Beethoven snatches the opportunity to drink some of the publisher's beer while the latter is distracted.

This scene is not only somewhat embarrassing and gauche; it is also contrary to the facts. Throughout his lifetime, Beethoven enjoyed a great reputation. He never had difficulty in getting his music performed. In his battle to keep custody of his nephew Karl he was able to count on powerful aristocratic backing. Beethoven did not suffer from a lack of money; he suffered from a kind of pathological fear of lacking money, which led him into such questionable practices as selling the same piece to several buyers. Gance certainly had enough material for tragedy without having to distort the facts of Beethoven's later life. Even so, despite such distortions, Gance succeeded in creating a tragic figure of titanic dimensions. As Philippe Esnault has written, it is impossible not to be astonished by the film: 'Gance expresses through Beethoven a common obsession with genius; Beethoven shall be the symbol of genius . . . A cineaste "composer of films" sings Music, symbol of all art . . . Romanticism is its subject; Romanticism is its form. The cinema becomes music; Gance becomes Beethoven.'

Perhaps there are two orders of genius. There is the genius which is so blind an instrument of its capacities that it does its work without being conscious of its historical meaning. But there are also the Beethovens, the Wagners, self-conscious, aware of their role. They execute their mission in a world fraught with disbelief. In this class belongs Abel Gance. Gance does not have the innocence of a Mozart; indeed, his genius lies in trying to point out to a sceptical world the heroic role of genius in modern life. ■

Harry Baur as Beethoven



*In Britain, a print of Gance's film is preserved in the National Film Archive.



Burt Reynolds, Eddie Albert in 'Hustle'; Kim Novak, Peter Finch in 'The Legend of Lylah Clare'

WORLDS APART:

Aldrich since The Dirty Dozen



Richard Combs

After a relatively fallow period through most of the 1960s, the films of Robert Aldrich have not only found new vigour in the last eight years, but have worked through a number of intriguing transformations. Many of Aldrich's more recent projects seem to have unconsciously revived subjects from the 1950s, his first and richest decade as a director. *The Legend of Lylah Clare* is a re-projection in more distanced and ironic but possibly more personal terms of the hero's struggles in *The Big Knife* for creative control in both his private and professional life. *Ulzana's Raid* takes up the Indian problem of *Apache*, but substitutes for its liberal rhetoric, and its attempts to get 'inside' and understand the dissident hero, a tougher and more complex strategy of keeping him always out of reach, watching him operate in some region beyond the sympathy or comprehension of the white characters. Aldrich's latest, *Hustle*, is *Kiss Me Deadly* strained through, and inevitably polluted by, the conventions of the recent 'dirty cops' cycle (and by the messiness of a script which indulges so much overstatement and special pleading). It preserves, however, the moral clarity of the earlier film, measuring the distance between the hero's perception of himself and his actions and the way he actually functions in his job.

Unavoidably, the changes in Aldrich's films owe not a little to the changing commercial framework within which he works. His career seems to have been determined by a tension between his attempts to push out towards greater independence and individuality, in terms of choice and control of material, and his effort to retain a base in the most popular genres and subjects. As early as his second feature (*World for Ransom*) in 1954, Aldrich was also functioning as co-producer; in 1955, he formed his own company, The Associates and Aldrich; and in 1967, after the huge commercial success of *The Dirty Dozen*, he purchased his own studio. This last enterprise proved a disaster, and after turning out four commercial failures (three as director, one as producer), Aldrich sold the property and returned to compete on the open market.

Most strikingly, the films that came out of the studio have a hermetic atmosphere which intensifies the sense of claustrophobia that Aldrich commonly brings to his subjects: a confinement which seems eventually to drive his people to the brink of madness, or at least to an aggravated and fearful sweatiness (a persistent physical condition in Aldrich movies). Only the furnishings of these cells change from film to film, from the clutter of a London mews flat in *The Killing of Sister George* to the foliage of a Pacific jungle in *Too Late the Hero*. The sense of neurotic enclosure works best, however, when deployed in physically open surroundings, in *The Grissom Gang*, for instance, or to savagely paranoid effect in *Ulzana's Raid*. In the context of stage adaptations like *Sister George* (or *The Big Knife*) there is a feeling of one enclosure superimposed on another, a dramatic redundancy which drives everyone involved to destructive extremes of flailing energy in the attempt to break out. The films that have followed the demise of the Aldrich studio look far less like chamber pieces, less tightly structured round snarling clashes of temperament which at times seemed only loosely geared to the conventional excitements of the plots. The films' texture has

broadened to accommodate different entertainment mixtures: *The Mean Machine* is the blockbusting formula of *The Dirty Dozen*, infiltrated with a sense of wit and burlesque which simultaneously reduces the situation to caricature and gives it the pointedness of a parable.

The Legend of Lylah Clare was made for MGM in 1968, just before the studio venture was under way. Little seen (and not shown theatrically in this country at all), it has acquired something of a cult reputation—mainly, it seems, for the adroitly cynical fashion in which it flaunts all the showbiz trappings and dirty secrets of Hollywood exposés, transcribed in the tone of an acid gossip columnist, rather like the malevolent, crippled harridan who features in one or two of the film's power plays. A lot of these details are relishable in themselves, and Aldrich includes a number of more personal items: a theatre marquee for *The Dirty Dozen*, a reference to the arrival of some adulatory French critics. The main problem is that all this flummery weighs too heavily on a film whose dramatic centre is persistently shrinking.

In the general context of movieland make-believe, with particular reference to sexual confusions and ambiguities, Aldrich situates a twofold power struggle in which each side stands the other off to an inconclusive draw. A lionised Hollywood movie director, Lewis Zarkan (Peter Finch), has fallen on unproductive times since the death of his star and lover, Lylah Clare; he discovers ambitious ingenue and Lylah look-alike Elsa Brinkman (Kim Novak), and so successfully sets about her transformation that Lylah II becomes as tantalising a mystery to him as her prototype. Lewis, it is pointed out, has the opportunity of living the most important part of his life over again, or of making the same mistakes again. And Aldrich plots the closed circuits of his baffled creative and emotional energies with crystalline images of an ambivalent ivory tower retreat: partly a final act of integrity, as he refuses offers to come back to work on assignments that 'any one of a dozen competent directors' could handle, and partly narcissistic self-immolation. Both qualities seem inherent (along with the release of energy in all kinds of game-playing) in the show business settings to which Aldrich is so drawn. And both fairly sum up all his equivocal heroes, held together by a fierce insistence on integrity which also involves an egotism that is equally clearly seen as a sickness.

Unfortunately, in the satirical terms with which Aldrich defines the movie colony in *Lylah Clare*—from Ernest Borgnine's Neanderthal studio chief to the dog-food commercial at the end which escalates into carnivorous chaos—the *Vertigo*-like puzzle at the centre has nowhere to go but into self-satirising dream images. The theatrical posturing and didacticism of *The Big Knife* produced a queasy spectacle on the screen; but its hero's agonising over the honesty of his commitments retained a validity which this film never bestows on the resurrected scraps of Lewis' real and/or movie life with Lylah.

Lewis' central preoccupation—"To find out what went wrong. Did she love or did she hate me? Does it matter now?"—is also phrased too glibly in terms of whether or not

Lylah was having a lesbian affair. A similar question arose back in 1954 in *World for Ransom*, when a lesbian scene was cut by the studio, to Aldrich's protest that it altered the sense of the characterisation, which should not have conveyed that the hero held 'the girl's past loose life with men against her, but he couldn't fight her preferring women to him.'* That such radical betrayals should replace simple heterosexual competition is perhaps not so surprising in a director whose tight, almost airless images seem to contain scarcely room enough for one character, and cannot include two without immediately drawing the line between two discrete, self-sufficient worlds. Sex, it seems, strengthens rather than complicates the divisions: 'I don't think it's anti-lib to say that women's goals collide with men's goals. It's all very well to say that the two can live harmoniously, but I don't think that's quite true,' Aldrich said in an interview with Harry Ringel (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1974). Aldrich, at any rate, has rarely been willing to test the boundaries with any developed heterosexual romance, and lately has strictly divided his projects between the stories about men and those about women. The recent exception, *Hustle*, is a curious and devious case: the real life of its male and female leads resides in their professions; they meet only in a fantasy of a world they'll never have.

Of the two all-women subjects produced at the Aldrich studios, the more 'serious', *The Killing of Sister George* (1968), is severely limited by the enforced separation of all the theatrical elements that can only work in loose, comic juxtapositions. Fighting his way into Frank Marcus' play, Aldrich has not only refrained from opening it out on any level, but actually closes every scene down around the dialogue. The result is expressive enough in one or two of the heavier rituals of dominance and subservience that play on the physical presences of his stars: the sado-masochistic game of penance, in which George (Beryl Reid) forces her baby doll companion Childie (Susannah York) to chew the stub of an old cigar. On this occasion, Childie frustrates George's pleasure by feigning too active and overtly sexual an enjoyment of her punishment. But for the most part, the style of their exchanges is too harsh and battering for the comedy of their sparring fantasies to survive intact: George and Childie finally only seem to connect in relation to the controversy that arose over the film's treatment of lesbianism.

Similarly, George's participation in a cheery, *Archers*-type TV series is no longer a comic foil to the strenuous emotional action at the centre of the play, but a laboured black comedy on the trivialisation of life by art. Aldrich's peculiar effectiveness in seeking out and testing all manner of subjective delusions in violent confrontations is often mated by his inability to conjure up his characters' fantasies directly in terms of anything but derisory kitsch. Hence his failure in *Lylah Clare* (despite its common comparison with *8½* and *Vertigo*) to envisage his director-hero's imaginative life as any-

thing more than a disease of lurid narcissism; and his application of a contemporary baroque glazing of lighting and camera angles, in lieu of more flexible metaphors, for the bouts of verbal one-upmanship in *Sister George*.

A more appropriate set of gargoyles is summoned in *What Ever Happened to Aunt Alice?* (1969)—a footnote to Aldrich's earlier demonstrations that the female of the species inspires blacker Guignol than the male, but a film which capitalises with splendid visual logic on the principle of disorder that sets it in motion. Produced by Aldrich, but directed by Lee H. Katzin, the film's dense, fragmented imagery, framing the new Eden of a demonic Eve, still looks quintessential Aldrich. With the death of her husband, and the discovery of her apparent penury, Claire Marrable (Geraldine Page) sets about recouping her gracious life by hiring and then disposing of a succession of friendless and reasonably well-off housekeepers. Their bodies wind up at the bottom of the garden, beneath a row of quickly flourishing pine trees. Picked out against the bleak Arizona desert, and in the brilliant, glistening photography of Joseph Biroc, which seems to capture some artificial environment beneath a vast geodesic dome, this grotesquely verdant growth blooms in a world from which all natural life, and normal human connection, seems excluded.

Too Late the Hero (1970) was apparently conceived before *The Dirty Dozen*, then shelved with the arrival of the project that initiated this particular breed of war movie—coupling the anarchic energies of gangster films to the socially sanctioned derring-do of conventional war spectacles. In the event, *Too Late the Hero* is rather truer to this violent contradiction, and to a cynicism about the morality of men who lead other men in war. The problems of authority are not solved with the packaging of the misfits for delivery behind enemy lines, where their anti-social behaviour can be of some use; leadership persistently unravels in the hands of whoever assumes responsibility in such absurd situations.

A patrol is despatched into the Japanese-occupied half of a Pacific island, to destroy an observation post before it can report the imminent passage of an American convoy. The nervous eagerness of its commander, Captain Hornsby (Denholm Elliott), to apply proper tactics in every violent confrontation is seen as a double absurdity; but after one or two notable and bloody blunders, Hornsby is granted his moment of professional redemption when he successfully marshals his errant forces for the attack on the listening post. He is killed, and through his dead, staring eyes the organised lunacy of command passes to Lieutenant Lawson (Cliff Robertson), the leisure-time soldier, a Japanese interpreter more or less press-ganged into joining the mission, whose reluctance to go any further than is strictly necessary is also directly responsible for Hornsby's death. Lawson's subsequent determination to drive the dwindling band of men back to their own lines with some vital information is as admirably single-minded, and ambivalently motivated, as Hornsby's professional soldiering.

The mixture of selfless devotion and

*Quoted in *Hysteria and Authoritarianism in the Films of Robert Aldrich*, by Ian Jarvie, *Film Culture* Nos. 22/23, 1961.

tyrannical obsession in both officers is matched by Aldrich's division of his chorus of the Common Man—expressing the indiscipline, disobedience and exuberance of the will to survive—into a sardonically commonsensical observer of military folly (Michael Caine) and a more wilfully anarchic, half-crazy jester (Ian Bannen). Aldrich's evident relish for the organised chaos of war lends a fascinating ambivalence to—and clearly cuts a lot deeper than—his declared liberal, anti-war sympathies. He has stated his preference for Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* over Fuller's *China Gate*; but although both films embody a similar cynicism about military bureaucracy, the energies of *Too Late the Hero* couldn't be further from Kubrick's smooth dovetailing of personal causes and historical situations. Aldrich's war movies take place, like Fuller's, in a continuous present, and authority tends to be as arbitrary in its application as the individual is in resisting it. The resulting to and fro of tensions seems to typify Aldrich's view of relationships in any social situation; and the 'war' model, with the added paranoia of its arbitrary but absolute division of 'us' and 'them', recurs in his treatment of social antagonism and breakdown in other settings (*Emperor of the North*, *The Mean Machine*).

In his wartime essay on the huge popular success of James Hadley Chase's *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*, George Orwell commented on the new tendency for crime stories, written from the angle of the detective, to be far more anti-social than their counterparts from before the First World War told from the side of the criminal. Although the remark has interesting relevance to one or two of Aldrich's tales of detection (*Kiss Me Deadly*, *Hustle*), it has little to do with his adaptation of *Miss Blandish* (*The Grissom Gang*, 1971). Here the detective seems to play little part in what Aldrich has essentially constructed as a black comedy of manners. He becomes the jaundiced observer, similar to other characters (Burt Lancaster in *Ulzana's Raid*) Aldrich has cast in films that are principally about the social attitudes of their protagonists.

Orwell identifies the thirst for power as the driving force behind the scenes of violence and sadistic sex in *Miss Blandish*: The same ambition runs rife through *The Grissom Gang*, but involving economic and cultural antagonisms as well as those of brute force. Waspish Thirties heiress Barbara Blandish (Kim Darby) is kidnapped by a riotously bumbling gang of hoodlums, whose captive is soon taken from them by a more ruthless outfit, led by Ma Grissom. The most vicious of this bunch, retarded psychopath Slim (Scott Wilson), takes a fancy to Miss Blandish, and proceeds with a grotesque parody of courtship which has to overcome not only the girl's revulsion but the savage instincts of his own family, whose plans for a sizeable ransom also include the eventual disposal of their hostage.

As Miss Blandish realises both her life-and-death dependence on the violently unpredictable Slim, and the limited room for manoeuvre that his devotion allows her, their situation strikes up interesting parallels with John Fowles' *The Collector*. There the hostile stand-off between the cultural

haves and have nots is fought to a lethal stalemate; in *The Grissom Gang* a kind of accommodation takes place, as Miss Blandish resentfully allows herself to be absorbed into the Grissom family, and into the style and status of a moll, while Slim earnestly sets about acquiring (with his share of the ransom) the trappings of the luxury class. The results are realised by Aldrich with a lickerish delight in all the physical incongruities, the whole-hearted vulgarity of the clash of styles that amounts to an opulent parody of both. Once the Grissoms move from the country to the town, to take up the night-club business they have strong-armed their way into, Slim proudly introduces his companion to the plushly horrific sanctuary he has created for them ('Yessir, it's really elegant'), while she demolishes his picture of future domestic bliss with one disdainful interjection, 'I don't cook.'

But while their attitudes and backgrounds box them into a relationship as irreconcilable as that in *The Collector*, they both find on the way a kind of liberation. Slim's final triumph over his mother in the question of the killing of Miss Blandish effectively releases him from a crippling tyranny, and he then immediately turns to his father, the generally meek, superfluous adjunct to the gang, with a question as to how he would go about making Miss Blandish a dry Martini. For her, there is emotional release in her last night with Slim, hiding from the police after the destruction of the rest of the gang, when his evident willingness to die rather than lose her finally overwhelms her as a love which, she confesses, she has never felt for anyone nor anyone for her.

Aldrich embeds this sardonic tale of love's labours lost in hot, airless places (from the opening scene of the first set of kidnappers conferring sweatily in a dingy eatery by the side of a country highway) and in an historical context of hard times and little charity. He colours and cuts it, however, with a harsh period glitter and rasping rhythm which occasionally accompanies the mayhem on a heady spin into slapstick. *Ulzana's Raid* (1972) sets up its cultural oppositions just as ruthlessly, and never for a moment distances them with any protec-

'*The Mean Machine*': rebellion (Burt Reynolds) and authority (Eddie Albert)



tive colouring, either of period or genre. Starting from a brilliantly concise and double-edged script by Alan Sharp, Aldrich shapes the film tightly to the tactics of a military exercise. He equips the audience, in fact, with no more information, and no larger perspective, than is available to the small detail of soldiers assigned to track down an even smaller group of Apaches who have taken off from their reservation on a spree of destruction.

The film thus wittily opposes itself to a host of contemporary Westerns which have fashionably taken up the Indian cause, only to play out all the old clichés with the roles of hero and villain simply reversed. For the most part, *Ulzana's Raid* does its utmost to make the title character as implacably alien and terrifying as possible. Ulzana is first discovered peering hungrily through the long grass at the approach of a homesteader's wife and child being escorted to safety by a single soldier; and his every action seems designed to confirm the scout, Mackintosh (Burt Lancaster), in his conviction that the 'hostiles' are out to rape, murder, burn and torture.

Ulzana's plight becomes accessible only as the limitations of his raid become evident. With no hope, or even intention, of making a permanent escape, he and his braves trail back and forth across country, sustained only by whatever horses they can steal, and whatever violence they can commit to reawaken the sense of self deadened by the reservation. In this respect, they also function as a parody of many a latterday Westerner—from Vidor's Man without a Star thinking of trying his chances in Canada, to Peckinpah's legion of losers gazing wistfully towards Mexico—who feels the horizons of his country tightening uncomfortably. It is characteristic of Aldrich that Ulzana should be denied even such illusions of escape; though to the pursuing white men, the possibility that he might 'trail south' into Mexico remains for a while a forlorn hope.

Ulzana's Raid, in effect, is the Aldrich war movie brought home, stripped of its easy cynicism and set down in a familiar, wide-open landscape which disconcertingly begins to turn in on itself in images of closeted madness (the settler determined not to let the Indians have his land who barricades himself inside in a fit of useless defiance; the last desperate stages of the battle with the surviving white men huddled beneath a wagon). Most succinctly, the film traces the transformation, under the pressure of the total, inexplicable 'otherness' of his quarry, of patrol leader Lieutenant DeBuin's Christian charity into a burning desire to tame and colonise. Crystal clear in its strategies, *Ulzana's Raid* thus draws every paranoid fear and hostility from its characters, and then uses them as darts to shoot back (the target at the time might well have been Vietnam). One of the most strikingly original Westerns of the past decade, it is probably Aldrich's finest film since *Kiss Me Deadly*.

With the disappearance of his studio, and the conspicuously broader modes of knock-about humour and action that have characterised his attempts to work back to commercial security, Aldrich seems to have entered on to something of a self-caricaturing phase. In *Hustle*, the tendency is largely

vindicated as he locates darker and more personal patterns through the confusing conventions of other thrillers; but in both *Emperor of the North* and *The Mean Machine* the game-playing situations that have lurked beneath his warlike metaphors for conflict and change are brought out into the open and deployed for self-conscious sport.

A fantasy about the Depression, *Emperor of the North* (1973) offers a classic opposition of interests: on a North-West railway route, a brutal guard, Shack (Ernest Borgnine), maintains the reputation of the 'No. 19' as the train that no hobo can ride—until he meets his match in A-No. 1 (Lee Marvin), the hobo who accepts the challenge of staying aboard the '19' to earn the title of 'Emperor of the North Pole' from his fellow vagrants. In a time of such all-round deprivation and lack of social cohesion, Aldrich relishes the bizarre congregation of the various elements (the patchwork hordes of hobos, the argumentative factions of railyard workers) round this absurd contest. And he establishes with a fierce sense of physicality the absolute dedication of the participants to a struggle that is a violent combination of the imaginary and the real.

Unfortunately, the larger-than-life scale of the action, and of the personalities, is too explicitly spelled out by a script which confers a strenuously myth-making tone on the dialogue, and provides by way of contrast with the two uncompromising antagonists a young tenderfoot (Keith Carradine) who is all bluff and boast. What the film conjures most vividly, however, is a sense of the terminal state of the government of man by man; and within the overall breakdown of the apparatus of democracy, the groupings of characters are consistently broken up by a raw editing style—cutting from a low angle close-up of one agitated, straining face to another—which seems to be working out from moment to moment a precarious balance of volatile forces.

In equally diagrammatic form, *The Mean Machine* (1974) presents a situation in which the potentialities for social anarchy are teasingly played off against an authoritarian system. To the Citrus State Prison comes Paul Crewe (Burt Reynolds), a professional football player rumoured to have sold out his team; he is blackmailed by the warden (Eddie Albert) into forming a football squad from among the prisoners, to give the guards' team a try-out before they go on to anticipated glory in the semi-professional league. While attempting to pull his rough-necks together, it occurs to Crewe to dent the pride of the system by actually winning the game. After temporarily succumbing to further blackmail from the warden to lose the match, Crewe rallies his men for a bone-crushing last-minute victory (a bedazzling display of slow motion) that leaves the establishment in rout. As the crowds disperse, Crewe walks away across the field and the warden hysterically insists that someone shoot before he escapes; but Crewe merely stoops to pick up the ball and returns to hand it to the dumbfounded warden. A wittily fitting conclusion for a film that remains ironically aware of the limitations set—both in the game that Crewe is playing, and in the sporting reach of its own political metaphors—to this smashing gesture of insurrectionary violence. Vigorously pushing



Ulzana's Raid: worlds apart in 'Aldrich's finest film since "Kiss Me Deadly"'

against the limitations, Aldrich delivers the gesture with great physical gusto and bruising black humour.

The hints of compromise and cynical accommodation in the Reynolds character in *The Mean Machine* take deeper and more intricate root in *Hustle* (1975). After the extrovert power plays and broadly comic skulduggery of the previous two films, what is most immediately striking about this project is Aldrich's attempt to anchor it some way below the level of the script in a sustained mood of regret, where secret griefs and humiliations can fitfully connect before spinning briskly on their own way to perdition. In place of the worlds-apart ambience inhabited by most Aldrich characters, *Hustle* nags away at the persistent overlaps (stressed in the editing and sound) between its disparate plots and people. Principally between the middle-aged Korean War veteran, Marty Hollinger (Ben Johnson), whose teenage daughter is found dead on a beach, and the police lieutenant, Phil Gaines (Burt Reynolds), who is sympathetic to Hollinger's grief but unwilling to heed his suspicions that the girl's death was not suicide. What links them is a thick mood of masochistic frustration—Gaines dreams of taking off for Rome with the call-girl Nicole (Catherine Deneuve), with whom he lives and whose profession seems to insulate him in a way from the kind of shocking infidelity he suffered with his ex-wife, while Hollinger berates the unrewarded lot of the veteran. One direct cut leads straight from Gaines' reverie over his wife's betrayal to Hollinger's obsessive replay of memories of his daughter.

Inevitably, both men approach a mournful catharsis, and virtual self-destruction; the violence made the more inevitable by Gaines' evasions and determination to 'keep the lid on' the Hollinger case, in what seems initially a sympathetic concern for closing off as much pain as possible for those involved. But out of the series of well-thumbed references in Steve Shagan's script that seem determined to duplicate

Save the Tiger, and its dyspeptic despair on behalf of a betrayed middle class, Aldrich constructs a picture of his hero as a man turning to the past as a symptom of his emotional repression. This perspective is gradually made clear through a reversal of sympathies between Gaines and his black partner Belgrave (Paul Winfield), who is first seen displaying marked insensitivity to the grieving Hollinger, and then using unrestrained violence in the treatment of a suspect, while his partner lectures him on compassion. But in his insistence on carrying through the Hollinger investigation, Belgrave is revealed as having better instincts as a cop and probably a tougher, more responsible notion of justice. In one or two confrontations Gaines tackles in the line of duty, a more neurotic violence seems to spring from his repressed rage: emptying a whole magazine into the already dead body of a psychopathic murderer; finally dying himself when he precipitously takes on a gunman holding up a liquor store. And his dream of a faraway romantic sanctuary with Nicole is steadily revealed to be a pipe-dream; the film phrasing its sense of their wish-fulfilment relationship, and the distance between them, in terms of a curious network of cultural differences (she takes him to see *Un Homme et une Femme*, they then repair to a bar where *Mission Impossible* is playing loudly on a TV in the corner while Gaines confesses that he has fallen in love with Nicole).

Given the obstacles posed by the script, *Hustle* never quite manages the astonishing transformation of dross into gold of *Kiss Me Deadly*. It convincingly adds, however, all the shadows and the tragic, emotional density of Aldrich's classic exercise in *film noir*. And it suggests precisely the kind of material to which—in a period when his projects must be more than ever subject to the commercial arbitration of others—Aldrich is able to lend a bleak authority of tone, and a set of attitudes that might be summed up as the vigorous assertion of irreconcilable doubts and tensions. ■

FUTURE PLAYBACK

THE NEW TECHNOLOGIES

John Chittock



Philips VCR equipment in use in the classroom

With the use of the universal language of moving pictures, the true meaning of the brotherhood of man will have been established throughout the earth.—D. W. Griffith.

Young man, you should thank me. This invention would ruin you. It can be exploited for a while as a scientific curiosity; beyond that, it has no commercial future.—Antoine Lumière, on refusing Georges Méliès permission to use the Cinématographe.

Against such historical pronouncements must be assessed, with caution, the conflicting views so often heard about video-cassettes, video discs and other new technologies. It has become fashionable to dismiss these recent innovations because initially they suffered from over zealous publicity, inaccurate journalism and plainly bad financial decisions. The cinema industry and broadcast television have come to be almost tired, if not tiresome, about the possible challenge of video-cassettes and video discs. The wave of initial panic passed in the early 1970s with some notable financial crashes in these new industries,

and there is now a danger of complacency. Yet a new revolution in the use of moving pictures is imminent, with consequences possibly more far-reaching than the cinema and socially more penetrating than broadcast television.

What is happening, very simply, is that scientists—followed by an assortment of commercial entrepreneurs—have been developing a variety of new ways of recording and replaying visual information. At its most elementary level, this may involve new ways of disseminating alpha-numeric information—text (for example, the systems developed by the BBC and ITV—CEEFAV and ORACLE respectively—for relaying such information as weather reports, news digests, etc., via the domestic TV set, which are already in operation on an experimental basis). At its most refined, it could bring three-dimensional movies into the home, with infinite choice of programming available at the touch of a button.

The Cassette Revolution

Interest began in the 1960s when 8mm film was given a new form of packaging, which

overcame the need for films to be laced into a projector and on to a take-up spool. The 8mm cassette film ended all that and became as simple to use as the now familiar compact audio-cassette. From then on, other refinements came, such as built-in back projection—enabling a slim executive briefcase to open out with a snapping of springs and become a desk-top cinema, with daylight viewing. Magnetic soundtracks were added to the 8mm film, then optical tracks. Only a short technological leap from there came the genuine video-cassette, known as EVR (for Electronic Video Recording). This used photographic film without sprocket holes to actually record the television signals originated in a TV transmission; these signals, converted to photographic densities, yielded a method of regeneration that could be fed into the aerial socket of a TV set. EVR was overtaken by events (and a fair share of financial upheavals), and although the system was commercially launched it was immediately challenged by the new generation of videotape cassette machines—e.g. the Philips VCR and Sony U-Matic (to name but two).

Videotape cassette equipment uses the well-established principles of magnetic recording for preserving and replaying television signals, again for display on a television set. The technology has been used in broadcasting for many years, and of course much of BBC's and ITV's output is recorded first on videotape; live television is almost exclusive nowadays to news and sports programmes. The videotape cassette machines are merely much simplified, engineered down to a price versions of the videotape recording gear used in TV studios; with refinements for the consumer, such as cassette loading and auto-clock control for pre-setting the recording time if you wish to tape a programme while you are out.

After the Philips VCR and the Sony U-Matic, the concept of playback via the home television screen has become complicated by a variety of other systems based on slightly different principles. Most commercially relevant—at least at the moment—are the 8mm telecine players. These again are consumerised versions of broadcast equipment, in this case of the equipment used for transmitting films (which is more refined than merely a TV camera pointed into the lens of a film projector). The 8mm telecine machines enable the user to play back 8mm home movies, in colour, on a domestic TV receiver, complete with sound. Only one is commercially available in Britain at present: the NordMende Colorvision, costing nearly £1,000. But it replays 8mm sound films on any domestic TV set with remarkable quality, better indeed than most television viewers enjoy at home.

The output from such devices can be fed into a television projector instead of a conventional TV set, thus providing a picture of some size. A new generation of

(relatively) low cost TV projectors is now becoming available. But low cost in these terms is still measured in a thousand or two rather than hundreds, and home viewing by TV projection is unlikely to become commonplace for a decade or two at least.

Video Discs

The basic problem with video-cassettes is cost. Even at a little under £500 for the equipment, with cassettes at, say, £20 a time, the general public is unlikely to rush to buy them. The video disc promises to break through this economic barrier. In this case, the television programme (which may, of course, be a film) is carried on a plastic disc similar to an LP audio record. A special turntable is required, and whereas one system—known as TeD—does use a stylus, most systems rely on optical or electrical scanning of the disc to reproduce the TV signals. For example, the Philips VLP disc carries physical indentations in an otherwise mirrored surface; these indentations cause modulation of an incident light beam when it is reflected by the surface into a photo-electric diode. Video disc players are, or promise to be, much cheaper than video-cassette machines, and the discs themselves cost no more than some LP audio records. The only commercially available video disc player—the Telefunken/Decca TeD—is now on sale in West Germany, Sweden and Switzerland, costing a little less than a colour television set.

Rival video disc systems abound, and of these the most challenging is the Philips VLP. This may be launched commercially at the end of this year, initially in North America. It promises up to one hour playing time per disc (against TeD's mere 10 minutes), total freedom from wear because it is a photo-optical system, extraordinarily good reproduction (this is a subjective opinion based on viewings of various systems I have seen), and an open-ended technology for further development. But, of course, nearly all video disc systems do not allow the user to record his or her own programmes. They rely on a supply of pre-recorded material.

Still Picture Retrieval

Most of the new video playback equipment, tape and disc, incorporates still picture devices for 'freezing' the action on the screen. The Philips VLP refines this even further by providing single frame display as an absolutely precise retrieval system; each frame of every 25 per second carries its own electronic code number—and if the user knows the number, it can be instantly 'called up' for display by tapping out the number on a keyboard built into the player. The implications of this are mind-bending. One 60-minute disc will contain 90,000 separate frames, any one of which could be retrieved by calling up its number. Thus some VLP discs may not carry moving picture programmes at all but simply huge stores of colour still photographs (e.g. colour pictures of all the birds of the world). After the mastering cost has been amortised, the further cost of pressing discs carrying 90,000 colour pictures each should send a shudder down the back of every colour printer in the business.

Some researchers are now playing with

the idea of interfacing video disc still picture retrieval with other technologies—such as cybernetics—so that visual fluency becomes as accessible as the printed word. Certainly the video disc could solve many problems for film archivists, whose vaults are bulging with material; but of course the technology is really geared for mass production runs—not the one-off pressing.

Other Technologies

Imagine it, and someone somewhere in the world has built a prototype. Once the idea has been mastered of converting moving pictures—or any kinds of pictures—into electronic signals which can be stored and/or processed, anything becomes possible.

Magnetic cards and sheets of photographic film both form the basis of other video systems in development: in these instances, the playback machine scans the card in a transverse pattern to 'read' the



The BBC's CEEFAX (pages of information available via a decoder); the Philips VLP video disc

signals. By converting the signals into digital form—that is, not continuously varying analogue waveforms but discrete 'bits' of information—the pictures become representable by numbers (rather in the same way that a typewriter picture, constructed by rows of letters on the paper, breaks continuous tones into quantifiable elements). Once the picture can be represented entirely by a string of numbers, it can be processed by a computer (which is, in fact, how space photographs are 'cleaned' up). To return to the Griffith quotation at the beginning, the idea of a universal language—rather than a variety of different modes of communication—begins to make sense; although certainly he didn't mean it quite in that Wellsian way.

When pictures are mathematically processable, a whole new vista opens up. For example, the film clips in a stock shot library could be catalogued on a computer with instant search and find for recognisable objects or visual characteristics. In the fore-

seeable future, some of these developments begin to look as if they will have a serious impact on the cinema and television. It is easy to forget that at the basic level film is only a physical method of storing and viewing moving pictures; likewise television. With film and television representing only the methods by which moving pictures are distributed, some of these new technologies offer some startling advantages.

The cinema has already suffered enough from television broadcasting. But, except for some viewers in North America, television has left little freedom of programming choice for the viewer. Additionally, broadcast television is now suffering from the effects of escalating costs in production and further refinement of the equipment employed. For the viewer, it has been virtually a free ride.

Video discs in particular could open up a new avenue for production and distribution finance. If the video disc manufacturers realise their aim, which is to find a consumer market comparable in size to television, the programme suppliers are no longer dependent on the commercial, political or moral control exercised by the EMIs, BBCs and Mary Whitehouses of this world. Moving pictures become as accessible as books, free of monopolistic influences, and no longer restricted by governments (other than by the emergence of another book-burning Dr. Goebbels). The relatively high capital cost of running off a few thousand video discs does, no doubt, imply that control will reside wherever there is capital. With video discs, there is no equivalent to the small-run, privately published book or roneo'd community newsletter. Nevertheless, videotape cassette systems are ideally suited to the cheap production of one-off copies. Video-cassette equipment is slowly becoming a standard tool in education and some community situations—even more so than the 16mm projector. The means are available, therefore, for minority groups and even for the individual to begin to find an audience with these new media.

Economic Repercussions

Here begins, however, a chain of events—leading from economic pressures—that could cause considerable change for the cinema and broadcast TV industries. In the first place, the problems of finding finance for the feature film are well enough known. Yet American television entertainment and culture is largely financed through commercial sponsorship, as indeed is ITV in the UK, albeit indirectly. The advertising industry has refined audience measurement and classification to an almost precise science, but has always suffered from one frailty when using broadcast television: the audience is less precisely definable than, say, that of the controlled circulation magazine. Indeed, this very same weak spot has been attacked by the newspapers and magazine press in their rearguard action to stop advertising revenue being lost to television. Advertising on television has been something of an overkill operation, hitting viewers indiscriminately. The video disc could change all that. The chairman of one of Britain's biggest agencies has predicted that his industry will become seriously

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THE HISTORIAN AND FILM



Jerry Kuehl

Jerry Kuehl, who is a producer for Thames Television and who was one of those principally involved with Thames' 'World at War' series, has himself contributed a chapter to 'The Historian and the Film'.

*The Historian and the Film** is published by the Cambridge University Press and has been edited by the very able Dr. Paul Smith. It contains essays from eminent contributors, including Marc Ferro, Rolf Schuurmsa and Professors Donald Watt and Arthur Marwick. The very fact of the book's existence would seem to confirm that academic historians no longer invite ridicule or condescension when they proclaim a belief that film is something which serious students of history ought to take seriously.

It was not always thus. Paul Smith, in his lucid introduction, recalls the dark days in Britain before the 1960s, when academic seriousness and interest in film did seem to be incompatible; when the love that dare not speak its name was that of a professional historian for the archives of the Imperial War Museum. What changes in a decade! The British University Film Council's first conference; the funding of the Slade Film History Register; the establishment of the Open University and its talented production team—all of which, in their various ways, have contributed to the growth of a genera-

tion of visually literate students, the erosion of hostility between film-makers and historians and the reconciliation of once hostile factions within the teaching profession itself.

The present volume, which contains eleven essays on the nature of film evidence, the location, preservation and analysis of archive materials, the use of film in the classroom, relations between professional academics and professional film-makers—is both the fruit and symptom of this development. None of the contributors find it necessary to try to *persuade* the reader of the importance of what they are doing; nor to defend themselves against the implied charge that they ought to be doing something better with their time and talents. So Lisa Pontecorvo wastes no space on telling historians that they ought to visit the film archives in Paris and Rome; instead she gives them some idea of what they will actually find when they get there. Clive Coultass of the Imperial War Museum doesn't think it necessary to argue in favour of there being an IWM archive; he is more concerned to talk about what the archive contains and how it might be beneficially used. Professor William Hughes' contribution represents something of an advance on the bad old days as well: his earnest concern to correct misunderstandings about the nature of films as evidence at least presupposes that there are incorrect views to correct.

Such controversies as there are, are rather muted. Professor Hughes and Nicolas Pronay both quote Oscar Levant's description of the content of American newsreels between the wars ('a series of fashion

parades followed by a disaster'). But Hughes quotes the description with approval; while Pronay thinks the newsreels were no less serious in content than *The Times* newspaper. Hardly the kind of dispute which is either unresolvable in principle, or in practice likely to lead to broken careers or ruined friendships.

Finally, and most encouraging of all to those who care about film and history, is Arthur Marwick's account of who, pedagogically speaking, is doing what to whom these days: a great deal by a great many people. American workshops, seminars, courses; British pilot schemes, work in schools, production by the Inter University consortium: a substantial essay which might be longer still if Professor Marwick were not so modest about the ambitions and recent achievements of his own institution—the Open University.

And yet the impression left by the work as a whole is disquieting, even gloomy. Now since the essays themselves are nothing of the sort, the disquiet cannot stem from the book's contents. What then? The first source is the fact clearly observed by Paul Smith, that the book should be necessary in the first place. No one would think of devoting energy to the study of 'The Historian and *Print*' he says, and he is right. The first public suggestion that film should be housed in archives and used to study history was made three years after the cinema was invented, and the arguments used by Matuszewski then were no less persuasive than they are today. Yet more than three-quarters of a century passed before even this modest symposium has seen

**The Historian and the Film*, edited by Paul Smith. Cambridge University Press, £4.95.

the light of day. And it is a matter of regret that no one comments on this gap; apart from a brief mention by Paul Smith himself.

It may be, of course, that those contributors most qualified to write such an account are those most scarred, so to say, by their Years in the Wilderness Before Their Work Became Respectable. There is indeed a hint of this in Nicolas Pronay's careful essay on newsreels. No one has been more diligent and persistent than he in trying to discover what editors, distributors and proprietors thought they were doing when they financed, made or showed newsreels; but he does seem faintly embarrassed by the people who actually *saw* them. They were not 'effective readers', they were members of 'lower classes', they could not even comprehend Wickham Steed's dispatches. One can't help feeling that he feels that his work would be more worthwhile if only the newsreel audience *had* been middle class *Times* readers, and not simply those who 'manipulated' them. Then they would have been worthy of the attention of the serious historian which he clearly considers himself to be, and is.

There is another deficiency in *The Historian and the Film* which I think can be attributed to the long years when the relations between film and history were not much talked about in polite company: the contributors to this volume are all veterans of a common struggle for recognition, which they have now achieved. Not surprisingly, what they say sometimes reads rather more like a chairman's annual statement than the work of a diligent consumer's advocate.

For example, Lisa Pontecorvo's catalogue of archives is admirable as far as it goes, but she is too tactful to point out that of the three Paris repositories, only two are open to the public, while the third, the Cinéma-thèque, is a private foundation, access to which is entirely at the discretion of its formidable director. She rightly points out that the Istituto Luce has an unparalleled collection of materials from the Italian fascist period; but is too polite to add that material ordered from them may take up to eighteen months to arrive, if it arrives at all. And no one would guess, from the careful neutrality of the language she uses to describe the two systems of preserving archives (film and videotape) that advocates of film did warn tape enthusiasts of the defects of their system; saw one of the major British libraries—Visnews—undertake a programme of transfer to tape of all their nitrate film and then find themselves obliged to reconsider the entire project because the predicted faults materialised; only to see another major library—Pathé—prepare plans (not yet, thankfully, implemented) to transfer *their* nitrate film to tape.

Similarly, Clive Coultass describes some differences between the British Film Institute and the Imperial War Museum, but is too discreet to suggest that their differing attitudes towards the admittedly difficult questions involving copyright go a long way towards explaining why film-makers are so eager to work with the War Museum and so reluctant to approach the BFI; and too amiable, perhaps, to spell out just how damaging to the world of serious film research is the refusal of the International

Federation of Film Archives to welcome documentary archives, like the IWM, and the US National Archive, as members.

In other words, these contributors (and they are not alone; Donald Watt's lively essay would be livelier still but for his admitted concern to avoid libel) know more than they feel able to say; and as a consequence much of what is clearly intended to be practical help tells old hands less than they know already, and fails to tell beginners enough to get them properly started.

But none of these blemishes are enough by themselves to account for the sense of unease that the symposium generates. The root cause of that unease is, in fact, precisely the sense of accomplishment with which the book is suffused. There is no sense of complacency in the contributions—far from it. But there is an implicit cheerfulness, which is not entirely justified.

In his account of the revolution in attitudes of the 1960s, Paul Smith refers to the Slade Film History Register; it indeed is a unique catalogue of British archive holdings; an indispensable tool for any serious student of documentary film in this country. He warns in his concluding paragraph that—in common with other worthy projects—the ability of the Slade Film History Register to function properly may be threatened by lack of funding. He can save his breath. Since he wrote those words the register has, to all intents and purposes, ceased to function. Its staff has been dispersed. All that remains are its files—which are cared for by the British Universities Film Council from its own very modest budget.

Now if neither Lord Annan's own university, its original sponsors, nor the Social Science Research Council, which funded it, nor, most scandalously of all, the British Film Institute itself, thinks the project is worth supporting, then the revolution in attitudes presupposed and celebrated by this volume is, to say the least, not yet entirely complete.

The Open University is another case in point. The OU's admirable production team will not be making three hundred and fifty hours of film this year. It will be making two hundred and fifty hours. This cannot be described as a vote of confidence, or even a holding operation. It is a cutback, and a savage one; though Arthur Marwick may be too polite to say so in public.

Even the problems of use and accessibility are in some respects no closer to solutions than they were ten years ago: apart from the two major archives and a handful of specialised cinemas, there are still no facilities in the UK for projecting 35mm archive film for the purpose of study; the number of schools with usable 16mm facilities remains as low as ever; and since the 'rationalising' of the BFI's distribution network began in 1968, fewer non-fiction films are available than before.

But these problems are only the tip of the iceberg; there is one which threatens not just to chip a bit of paint off the good ship 'Historical Studies', but to send it right to the bottom: its name is *Nitrate Preservation*.

The nature of the problem—concisely described by Lisa Pontecorvo and Clive Coultass—is that virtually all 35mm film made before 1952 was made on nitrate stock; that nitrate stock deteriorates in-

exorably, and that to preserve it safely, it must be transferred to acetate film stock. However, neither author does more than hint at the magnitude of the problem, which is that given the current and projected rates of transfer, there is no practical way that the archives of the world will transfer all their holdings before they deteriorate irretrievably. (In some countries it is not even possible to increase the rate of transfer significantly, because the laboratory facilities for doing so have been run down to a point where they cannot cope with increased orders.) Here, it is a matter of will, rather than facilities. Both the specialised equipment and the trained technicians are available, but there is no money to pay for them.

The implications of this state of affairs are hair-raising: the first is that no library, archive or institution has been able in the past to undertake an adequate programme of nitrate film duplication. The second is that no archive, whatever plans it may have, has been able to secure the public or private funds necessary to undertake such a programme in the future.

This means that at the very moment that the historians and film-makers represented in this volume are getting into their stride, the materials on which they base their work are disappearing, before their very eyes—forever. Not that the blame for this rests entirely with the archives themselves. It takes two to tango, and no amount of persuading can loosen public purse-strings if their guardians are indifferent to the importance of the enterprise. In other words, even the most carefully budgeted programme will inevitably fail if presented to visually illiterate public authorities, or private foundations.

And what is true of film yesterday is true of television today. The same combination of indifference, shortsightedness and penny-pinching which has condemned so much of the filmed record of the 20th century to oblivion, will inevitably do the same to the television record. The eccentricity of the criteria used by the BBC and the commercial companies to decide what of their own material they wish to preserve for their libraries (e.g. the BBC's notorious propensity to junk sound, while keeping the vision track of filmed interviews) is only one element; the technical problems involved in preserving and using videotape are, if anything, more daunting. To mention but two: (1) Programmes are preserved on a kind of tape which is incompatible with the viewing facilities available to schools and universities; and programme companies are unwilling to make compatible versions; (2) Tapes may suffer from physical deterioration analogous to the deterioration of nitrate stock—except that no one knows if they do or at what rate: tape may last a thousand years, or it may turn out to be unusable in thirty.

In other words, the state of television archives is potentially even more precarious than that of the world's doomed nitrate collections.

The Historian and the Film is a valuable book. More like it should be published. If Paul Smith could be persuaded to edit the next in the series, I know what he could call it: 'Disappearing World', or perhaps, if he delays too long, 'Gone With the Wind'. ■

Film Reviews

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Milos Forman's version of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* must be one of the most discreet period-piece movies ever made. Apart from a snippet of a news broadcast referring to the Berlin Wall and to racial conflict in an Alabama school, there is little to indicate that the film has been set in the period (1962) when Kesey's novel first appeared. This vagueness of background creates a kind of multi-purpose ambiguity, which works to the film's advantage on several levels: it removes the portrayal of mental instability from the freaky, acid-tripping milieu of Kesey's book; it sets up definite, but indefinable, critical vibrations as to just how far the picture of mental health treatment is typical and currently applicable (the film was shot in the Oregon State Hospital, with the participation of some of the staff and patients, and apparently there were objections to one violent scene of electric shock treatment); and it preserves such a gently imperceptible claustrophobia about this setting that the final scene of release, when the 'one' of the title makes it out of the cuckoo's nest, comes as an unexpected and welcome exhalation of breath.

Ambiguity has always been the key to Forman's method, creating a comic aura about his characters which never quite settles on either detached appraisal or amused indulgence. Here, surprisingly, this ambiguity operates as much with Nurse Ratched (Louise Fletcher), Kesey's 'Big Nurse' and supreme tyrant of the ward, as it does with R. P. McMurphy (Jack Nicholson), the irrepressible troublemaker who is transferred to the institution from a prison farm, under suspicion of faking his symptoms of mental disorder. After one or two interviews with hospital psychiatrists, his 'condition' remains as nebulous as ever, especially since these scenes are clearly set up for McMurphy to match his inspired *non sequiturs* against the more humdrum lunacies of the institutional mind. But Nurse Ratched remains an even greater enigma: no longer quite Kesey's vision of bureaucratic fascism run riot (perhaps because the writer's rampant misogyny has been toned down a little, or because Louise Fletcher invests her most punitive rigidities with an uncanny sweetness and grace), she retains a professional dignity and at times a humane shrewdness that can be fair competition for McMurphy. At the end of one group therapy session which has degenerated into verbal brawling, Forman cuts between McMurphy's half-startled, half-amused reaction and Ratched's impassive countenance, drawing up the battle lines but also balancing out the virtues and vices of undisciplined release and unwavering control.

But ambiguities in the area of immediate confrontation unfortunately trail away into a less useful, overall kind of vagueness. In removing the hard, comic-strip oppositions, not to mention the hallucinating colour and lighting effects, of Kesey's vision, the film seems to have been left floating in something of a vacuum. (Why, for instance, since Nurse Ratched can no longer be taken for a subjective

figment of evil, does she insist on keeping McMurphy on the ward, given the likelihood that he is simply malingering?) The problem is compounded by the fact that scraps of Kesey's caricaturist style still remain, especially the unreal 'enamel-and-plastic' serenity of Nurse Ratched's features.

Refusing to situate their film within the specific paranoia of early 1960s counter-culture, Forman and his collaborators have shaped it as a more conventional allegory: McMurphy becomes an archetypal iconoclast, disrupting the smoothly functioning machinery of the *status quo* by daring to challenge its assumptions, and inevitably suffering the consequences. Where Kesey's hero remains throughout a dangerous, unstable influence, Jack Nicholson's irreverent mischief-maker seems destined to become a kind of alternative therapist for his fellow patients. But neither novel nor film, interestingly enough, explores the more charged ambiguity as to whether McMurphy, in aggressively leading the other inmates in little sallies against the System, might be merely replacing one authoritarianism with another.

What most patently sets the book in its time and place is the first-person narration of the Indian patient, Chief Bromden, who has protected himself by the pretence of being deaf and dumb, but through whose eyes the author gradually measures the revolutionary capacities of R. P. McMurphy. Unwilling to be influenced too directly by the ecological romanticism that has since attached itself to Indian culture, Forman for the most part relegates Bromden (Will Sampson) to the sidelines, a silent on-looker to whom McMurphy constantly appeals for support—until the moment when he

finally confers approval by offering to speak and instantly seals their alliance. Thus, in a sense, the Indian still fulfils the same function for drawing and directing audience sympathies. But this is consistently undercut by the facile connections the film is at pains to make between the two characters, cutting from the first individual shot of Bromden, lining up for the morning's medication, to McMurphy's arrival outside the hospital, and contrasting their fate in the gloomy opening and closing landscape shots. In the first, McMurphy is being transported across country between prison and clinic; and in the last, Bromden is seen disappearing into the darkness having crashed through the institution's wall. The effect of such juxtapositions is to render the two brothers-under-the-skin and allies before they know it, and even to merge them in one composite character.

What Forman achieves with most consistent success in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (United Artists) are the group portraits—the scenes of inmates embarking on some joint enterprise of liberating madness, such as their ecstatic display before the blank television screen as McMurphy leads them in an animated re-creation of the World Series baseball game that Ratched's working schedule has forbidden them to watch. The precariousness of such moments is given particular edge by the way Forman usually cuts from them—like a dousing of cold water—to the doctors' solemn post-mortems. What remains unsolved, however, is the problem of translating the heightened style and imagery of Kesey's anti-Establishment diatribe into the gentler rhetoric of Forman's social comedy, which seems to be continually drawing the disputants together as if nothing more had to be settled than a domestic disagreement.

RICHARD COMBS

Conversation Piece

The protagonist (Burt Lancaster) of Luchino Visconti's *Conversation Piece* (Fox-Rank) lives alone in a sombrely splendid apartment in Rome. He is a man of science who has abandoned science when he discovered that it was not neutral; he has turned instead to his collection of paintings, to music, to a composed, contemplative silence. He is *il Professore*: rich,

'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest': McMurphy (Jack Nicholson) arrives at the hospital



respected, and left alone. He inhabits, or imagines he inhabits, a small private world, an area of the real world cut off from politics, human claims, or time.

Time, however, provides the film's first image. The roll of a cardiograph unwinds behind the titles: the Professor has had a heart attack. This turns out in the end to be a flashback device, but of an unobtrusive kind and one which serves principally to open a theme. Which is: death is expected to interrupt the careful stasis of his days, and death in such a form is desirable, the ultimate though unspoken objective of his death-in-life. In choosing the manner of his life the Professor has also selected the stage for his death.

The Italian title, *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno*, tells how to look at the film, which is played entirely within the Professor's apartment and the apartment above him, and on the stairs and landings in between. Daylight is seen on the balcony, but it is studio daylight against a studio backdrop. But for *Death in Venice*, one might have supposed that set-planning of this order of severity would have dictated a *mise en scène* of similar spareness. However the contrary is the case. Like *Death in Venice*, *Conversation Piece* achieves its chamber music effects by the use of massive wide-screen and a majestically opulent score, and develops its introspective and auto-analytical theme with the aid of a camera style which lingers over faces and furniture and shadows as the Professor, with his magnifying glass, lingers over his paintings. Expensive technical resources which might normally be held in reserve for battles and chariot races are used here for a domestic story about the isolation of the self, and what happens when that self is suddenly invaded.

The invaders are Bianca Brumonti (Silvana Mangano), her son and daughter, and her lover Konrad (Helmut Berger). They enter the Professor's world like a barbarian horde, trampling over his refusals, seizing the upper apartment, and pulling down the walls. Harmony and order are violently overthrown. The Professor's protests are brushed aside as if his words have no meaning. The law on which he has always relied turns out to be ineffective. With her white face make-up, her black eye-shadow, her flaring nostrils, Bianca is the image of a vulpine Medusa, flooding the Professor's world of crepuscular sensibility with a stony, petrifying light. Blinking and protesting, he awakes.

What he awakens to makes up the rather unsatisfactory body of the film. Bianca and her children are rich. She is the wife of an industrialist, 'a well-known Fascist', as Konrad describes him. Konrad is himself some kind of revolutionary, active on the Paris barricades in 1968. The stark, absurd polarities allow the Professor no point of connection. Indeed, the audience can make no connection either; and there is a great deal at the centre of *Conversation Piece* which is hard to take. There is a nude pot-smoking scene which is no doubt dreadfully depraved. Konrad turns out to be archly knowing about music and painting. All this makes the audience restless; and indeed the falsity and pretension of much of the dialogue is severely dispiriting.

The Professor's involvement with his new family is intercut with a series of near-subliminal flashbacks to his old family, to the women—disturbingly represented by unnamed celebrities such as Claudia Cardinale and Dominique Sanda—who expected something of him, something he wouldn't give. These short, reproachful scenes work better in their contemplative way, in my opinion, than the theme of Konrad becoming the Professor's adopted son works in its active and melodramatic way. In the end Konrad commits suicide (it doesn't seem to matter very much), and the Professor suffers his heart attack. He is visited by Bianca, no longer malign, and her daughter. He has recovered his interior poise, and the film ends



'Conversation Piece': Stefano Patrizi, Claudia Marsani, Silvana Mangano

on a note of composure as if it too had found its natural point of balance, half in love with effortless death but paying lip service to the human need for friendship.

In spite of what seem to me to be major weaknesses, *Conversation Piece* is a haunting film, beautiful to look at and to listen to. The centre of it all is Burt Lancaster's performance. He makes those familiar gestures with his open hands, which here seem to be attempts at policing the chaos of events. His stiff movements and the way he holds his head suggest perplexity, but also purpose and aggression, subtly at odds with the story. 'I studied. I travelled. I was in the war.' His clipped style, his voice and carriage somehow expressing the control of a barely containable force, gives back to the film the solemnity and dignity which elsewhere is dissipated.

JAMES PRICE

The Killer Elite

The mixture of embarrassment and bewilderment that typified the critical response to *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* and *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* might be taken, in a way, as perverse acknowledgment that with these two films Sam Peckinpah came most completely into his own. Despite the physical mauling which *Pat Garrett* received before it left the studio, both films seemed to function according to a mood and set of rules which had little to do with current codes and genres: the one a Western that picked away layers of fashionable elegy to expose a mournful scene of moral waste, freedom palpably draining from a land of perpetual sunset, painted bright and black; the other a contemporary thriller more Gothic in the snares it set for its self-destructive hero than many a horror film.

A noticeably less personal project, *The Killer Elite* (United Artists) has already been condemned for a reverse set of sins—the stereotyped commercialism of its thick-ear ingredients, and its hand-me-down plot about the dirt that clings to the hands of anyone who messes with modern power politics. Unmistakably, however, the melancholia of the previous two films filters through the material, etching the political cynicism more deeply than *Three Days of the Condor* and other recent, muddle-headed exponents of the genre have done, and casting a

regretful aura of wasted lives behind each of the characters, even while encasing them in self-sufficient eccentricity. The result is a strangely dissonant and compelling entertainment, an unsettling criss-cross of Chinatown Nights' fantasy and dyspeptic meditation on figures set firmly in their contemporary landscape.

In an eminently picturesque location, on a headland overlooking San Francisco bay and the Golden Gate Bridge, Mike Locken (James Caan), hired executioner and general trouble-shooter for ComTeg, a 'special department' whose activities seem even more obscurely diffused than the CIA's, approaches a former colleague, Jerome Miller (Bo Hopkins), with an offer of work. When the latter demurs, wondering why the agency would want to employ someone they've already tagged as a 'psycho', Locken replies: 'You're not a psycho. You're the patron poet of the manic depressives.' The genius of *The Killer Elite* is that it not only bears out the statement in terms of the cheerfully gun-obsessed and trigger-happy Jerome, but asserts a similarly quizzical mood throughout its potboiling yarn. It half-guys and half-celebrates the motley crew of ex-professionals put together by Locken for his final mission, and insinuates a wistfulness about their wasting profession that somehow seeps beneath the script's several redundant speeches about their manipulation by the men on top.

Peckinpah consistently seizes opportunities to explore the mood by slowing the drive of the plot, most significantly in the scenes of the hero's early personal crisis and semi-demolition. At the film's opening, Locken and old buddy George Hansen (Robert Duvall) are transporting one of the political exiles taken in by ComTeg (whose special brief seems to be the elimination of traitors from their own side and the shelter of defectors from any other); abruptly, Hansen changes sides, blowing off the top of their charge's head and shooting Locken so as to incapacitate him for a long time. The subsequent sequence, superbly shot and edited, with a fine sense of the crippled agent's quiet terror, follows Locken in his slow progress from inert burden—lifted on and off the operating table by a straining team of doctors and nurses, his plasters later laboriously prised away from leg and arm—to shuffling misfit, sweating through physical therapy exercises, collapsing in a restaurant in a moment of vertiginous panic, and finally returning to the ComTeg training ground, where he is told he is not wanted.



'The Killer Elite': Bo Hopkins and James Caan meet above the Golden Gate Bridge

The rather blank determination expressed by James Caan halts this dour and desperate effort somewhere short of the emotional purgatory that Peckinpah seems to be pushing towards, and never really suggests the fires of revenge that are supposedly being stoked for Hansen. Locken's rebirth, however, remains fetchingly akin to similar moments in Kubrick, not least in the precision with which Peckinpah fits the character into archetypal images of the environment that produced him (the hilltop meeting with Jerome; a scene of Locken taking exercise by struggling up an impossibly long flight of steps in the San Francisco hills; and a breathtaking vista as he jogs at dusk through the streets of the city—which is all compacted and contained, it seems, in one telephoto shot).

For the rest, the film steadily closes out any options for change that might seem implicit in these hopeful moments of regeneration. A ComTeg executive, Cap Collis (Arthur Hill)—who will turn out to be working both sides for his own greater power—eventually visits Locken with the request that he assemble a team for the protection of Yuen Chung (Mako), a visiting Oriental of inscrutable allegiances, who must be kept alive for the few days he will be passing through the States, hotly pursued by a suicidal gang of assassins (who have also hired Hansen's services). As Locken's makeshift bodyguard rescue their man from a Chinatown neighbourhood, the film slips (rather more smoothly than did *The Getaway*) into self-parody, with a knockabout car chase and a delightful scene in which the fugitives, discovering a bomb planted on their vehicle, pass it over to an inquisitive highway cop, who obligingly trots off to drop it in the harbour.

But when Locken and his men are finally cornered in a ramshackle wharfside refuge, scenes of protracted flailing in the dark press in on the hero an awareness of how he has been ruthlessly used in a cause that seems all opportunism on one side and incomprehensible idealism on the other. The night-time shoot-outs are given an hallucinatory edge of horror (the brief glimpse of a row-boat, broken by a burst of machine-gun fire, slipping beneath the water which has turned fractionally pink); and the siege ends, inevitably, but without satisfaction for the disillusioned Locken, with Hansen's comeuppance. Unfortunately, it is also here that the script is most tempted to define the spiritual gloom with one or two searching exchanges, and

rather foolishly jettisons the impenetrable mystery which has attached to Yuen since the Chinatown sequence by pushing him forward as a beacon of democracy.

The earlier mood is splendidly reasserted, however, by the climactic confrontation aboard the eerily deserted warships of the American 'mothball fleet'. As Locken's team arrives, prior to seeing Yuen safely away to sea, Peckinpah intercuts glimpses of mysteriously grey-clad assassins slipping into position for a concerted martial arts assault. The uncanniness of this last battle is heightened further by the way the film pulls together its strains of humour and self-parody. In the decisive sword duel between Yuen and the leader of the assassins, Locken and his men draw back, setting themselves at a comic remove from the totally alien spectacle: 'What are those outfits anyway?'—'I dunno. Ritual gowns maybe'—'Goofy looking things.' The humour thus releases them in a way from the toils of a plot in which others have up to now held them; justifying, while only faintly mocking at, the final delirious image of wish-fulfilment escape, as Locken and his one surviving ally speed past the Golden Gate Bridge for the last time, in a yacht headed for the open sea.

RICHARD COMBS

The Man Who Would Be King

'More than chance has been at work here,' the crowned king Dravot (Sean Connery) observes in John Huston's *The Man Who Would Be King* (Columbia-Warner), as he rehearses to his partner the incredible succession of incidents which helped him on his road to royalty in one of the world's farthest-flung corners, Kafiristan (now Afghanistan). An avalanche brought about by their own homeric laughter helped them over an uncrossable crevasse; during a key battle in their campaign, an arrow hit Dravot's masonic medallion, enabling him to fight on unharmed—for the natives, a clear demonstration of his godhood; the medallion was then discovered to bear the same mark as a mysterious sign on a temple stone—for the priests, clear demonstration. 'You call it luck,' Dravot tells his less impressionable sidekick Carnehan (Michael Caine), 'I call it destiny.'

And more destiny than luck has led Huston to film Kipling's early (1888) but masterful short

story. Like other Huston films (*Moby Dick*, *The Red Badge of Courage*), the idea was nursed for many years since the first signs of it appeared in the 1940s, with Clark Gable and Humphrey Bogart as the proposed stars; and one can immediately see why it remained a pet project, for the story's subject-matter draws directly on Huston's own repertoire of themes and obsessions. Indeed, Rudyard Kipling is in some ways a kindred spirit: both Kipling and Huston share a fascination with the wayward ways of men in action; both also have the storyteller's instinct for plot twists and turns and eccentric characterisations (though, it must be said, some of Huston's yarns, from *Beat the Devil* to *The Macintosh Man*, have been spun out too ingeniously for their own good). And *The Man Who Would Be King*—at its deepest level a parody of British Imperialism and a treatise on the unalterable differences between West and East—is particularly suited to the director.

Its two main characters fit easily into the mould of other Huston adventurers, pursuing their chosen goal with reckless high spirits, occasional disguises and practical jokes (they start their journey in the costumes of a mad priest and servant; in the opening scenes Carnehan pushes an obsequious Indian out of a railway compartment). But their goal is enormous, dangerous, unholy. Of Melville's Captain Ahab, Huston once remarked in an interview, 'Here was a man who shook his fist at God.' Dravot and Carnehan are similar blasphemers: 'They have two-and-thirty heathen idols there,' Carnehan says jauntily, 'and we'll be the thirty-third and fourth.' Inevitably, they get too big for their boots and the mission fails: kingship and its trappings are stripped from them, with the contents of a treasure-chest cascading down the hillside, echoing the fate of the Sierra Madre gold. And Carnehan returns to his starting place withered, wrapped in rags, clutching the shrunken head of his partner.

The result, as one might expect, is lively, totally assured, and certainly one of Huston's more bracing movies, though inevitably the story emerges much expanded, with different emphases. Kipling told the bulk of the narrative via the idiosyncratic reported speech of Carnehan, in which descriptions are pared down to the occasional flash of homely imagery—'We starts forward into those bitter cold mountainous parts, and never a road broader than the back of your hand.' Huston fills out the picture: the 'bitter cold mountainous parts' become beautiful landscapes of snow so desolate that one half expects the travellers to tumble upon the smiling lamas of Shangri-La. As they struggle onwards to Kafiristan there is genuine mystery and magic—particularly when two scarecrows, designed to scare off people rather than crows, loom up in the mist, appearing oddly like giant wooden soldiers. Once civilisation, or something approaching it, is reached, Huston revels in the cut and thrust of tribal battles (whose progress is halted by a troop of priests, walking with closed eyes to avoid any worldly contamination), a savage kind of polo played with decapitated heads, religious rituals, and—most exhilarating of all—the final chase and capture of the imposters, a circle of grim-faced priests pressing forwards towards the deposed Dravot. Unfortunately, under the weight of the spectacle, the basic story line often sags and Caine's periodic narration (supposedly the speech of the withered and weary Carnehan, though it seldom sounds like it) proves an insufficient bolster; as in *Moby Dick*, Huston dwells on surface excitements at the expense of the material's spiritual under-layer.

As the tale's physical dimensions are elaborated, so are its characters. The most effective is Kipling's anonymous narrator, transformed into Kipling himself, a reporter for the *Northern Star*. Kipling also put in an appearance in George Stevens' *Gunga Din*, where he rides up in the closing minutes and scribbles his famous poem in honour of the late leader. Kipling's

presence here, however, is far more defensible: his amazement at the intended exploits of the adventurers helps to spotlight the craziness of it all, and Christopher Plummer—dressed in Kipling-esque glasses and a baby walrus moustache—gives a delightfully sober performance. Caine and Connery are equally fine (and Caine gives further proof of his unsung comic talents), but the script's bantering elaboration of the adventurers' pasts and personalities hinders their viability as symbolic figures—two matching alter egos venturing into dangerous new realms.

GEOFF BROWN

Ankur

Recent Indian film weeks in London and elsewhere have revealed the emergence of new talents, and not just from Satyajit Ray's Bengal. The Hindi film *Ankur*, or *The Seedling* (Contemporary), written and directed by Shyam Benegal, is one of several which take a fresh look at an India still in the grip of local superstitions and caste conflicts; and within the confines of a basically melodramatic format, it insinuates a social comment which emerges naturally from the narrative. The setting is a small, unkempt farm property in the middle of marshland and tall trees to which comes a new master—Surya, a rather arrogant young man sent by his well-to-do father to supervise the place, and saddled with a young bride due to join him when she comes of age. Declaring himself above caste differences, he soon takes to bed his attractive servant Lakshmi, who is herself tied and apparently devoted to her drunken deaf-mute husband. When his bride arrives, Surya's interest in her revives; afraid of scandal, he spurns Lakshmi and her unborn child.

Benegal starts with the advantage of an uncommonly assured narrative sense (his early career was in commercials and documentaries). His main achievement, though, is shrewdly to control the story when it seems to be heading towards the excesses of the commercial Indian cinema, and to show how the hero's apparently liberal attitude towards the girl's caste cloaks the same kind of hypocritical safe thinking that motivates the villagers. In the final episode, in which Surya cowardly whips Lakshmi's husband, Benegal manages to keep the scene just this side of out and out melodrama (he shoots it mostly in mid-shot), pointing up Surya's sense of humiliation and consequent loss of face within the community.

Working almost entirely on exteriors, in a countryside of lush green pastures in which the multi-coloured saris of the women stand out like rainbows, Benegal and his talented cameraman, Govind Nihalani, create a *mise en scène* only equalled in the Indian cinema by Ray's more formally composed works like *Charulata* and *Days and Nights in the Forest*. Indeed, the forest scenes in the latter may have influenced Benegal's visual style, for he employs a similarly roving camera, tracking his characters as they move from the little farmhouse across the fields to the outlying shacks and water-holes, and rarely losing sight of the tall 'toddy' trees which stand like sentinels in the background, looking down on the heated drama below.

The film also introduces a marvellous new actress, Shabana Azmi, as Lakshmi, and it is she who gives the central relationship its suppressed sensuality and force, and all done with a notably restrained, interior style (Anant Nag's Surya is less assured in the more intimate scenes, falling back on the inflexible staring of a more familiar Indian cinema). The power of Miss Azmi's playing overcomes her almost too beautiful appearance and well-kept make-up—'You look like a film star today,' says Surya at one point, which should have given Benegal the necessary clue. What finally impresses, though, is the way he integrates all the elements—story,

social comment, camera, colour, acting—into an assured, personally felt whole remarkable in a first film. He has since made another feature, *Nishant*, which was shown at this year's Bombay Festival and collected rather mixed notices. Apparently, it continues the theme of incipient revolt, showing how a village is exhorted to take revenge on a wealthy zamindar family following a kidnapping.

Clearly intent on catching the conscience of their times, India's new, struggling independent film-makers are, like the society they interpret, still seemingly caught between the new and the old ways. Traces of traditional mugging acting styles and conventional scripting survive in these works; perhaps they are even necessary to capture an audience unhappy without them. The main problem now is to reach a wider public both at home and abroad, and it is worth noting that *Ankur* has achieved a commercial success in London equalled only by the major Ray films.

JOHN GILLET

Promised Lands and A Sense of Loss

Although their strategies differ, both Susan Sontag's *Promised Lands* and Marcel Ophuls' *A Sense of Loss* are essentially personal meditations on the conflicts in Palestine and Northern Ireland. Both focus on the private pain within these public struggles, and in a sense use documentary materials to feel their way into an appreciation of what, emotionally, these situations of violent stalemate have meant to those involved.

For these are struggles which seem to be perpetuated by irreconcilable claims. Susan Sontag identifies the source of the Middle Eastern conflict in two titles to the land with long histories behind them: the Old Testament prophecy that the Jews will inherit the Promised Land, and the Arabs' centuries-old habitation of Palestine. Amidst remarkably pale physical surroundings—a muted sky, tan and grey stone—she seems to locate in the black clothing of priests, orthodox Jews and old people a symbol for the most uncompromising of territorial claims. Her film opens with two dark-clad women framed against a limestone doorway; two men in black kaftans appear, and one ascends the stone stairs of a church tower to sound out a cacophony of bells over Jerusalem,

the contested city. The film cuts from cross to cross against the sky, interspersed with shots of a TV aerial, as if to indicate the failure of modern as well as ancient religions to resolve all the clamouring of opinion—the sense of which is extended for a while, even over shots of the peaceful countryside, in the sound of the discordant bells.

But Sontag's intention is not at all the impartial weighing of the evidence on both sides. Her footage of the battlefields of the 1973 War seems to express a general grief for the dead littered and rotting amidst the mechanical flotsam; her particular concern, however, is for the sense of sorrow in Israel, and the deepening ambivalence at the prospect of an indefinitely continued struggle, that has followed in the wake of the '73 War. Her sympathies are demonstrated (as also are Ophuls') in a presentation of the hate propaganda of the other side: in a schoolroom littered with books, passages are read from anti-Semitic Arab texts which try to instil a sense of national unity by opposing a righteous, legitimate 'we' to a hostile, intruding 'they'.

Less clear, however, is what the film has to say about the state of mind of a war-weary nation, and the divisions that have consequently arisen within Israel. Two commentators are introduced (but not identified, since Sontag is aiming for a dialogue of representative views), the first—to judge from what Sontag has said—of left-wing, conciliatory beliefs, the second a staunch Zionist, but both actually coming across as surprisingly similar in background and opinion. Both are Ashkenazic Jews, second generation Israelis born of Eastern European Zionist immigrants, and each describes the frightened mentality of diaspora Jews who look to Israel as a refuge from centuries of persecution ('Israel is the answer to Auschwitz,' as the second speaker puts it). The first sets the context for the film by stating that Jews can recognise drama but not tragedy—a situation without solution, in which two rights are opposed to one another. He describes the *hubris* which accompanied the 1967 Israeli victory, and which helped to propel Israelis into a selfish consumer society, displacing the co-operative spirit of earlier years. His contention that out of their strength in 1967 the Israelis should have proposed a compromise is not supported by any suggestion as to what form it should have taken, save for the later proposal that the Jews give up the Sinai Desert, 'that piece of sand and so much blood.'

'The Man Who Would Be King': Dravot (Sean Connery) with the priests of Kafiristan



Not only are the viewpoints of these commentators vaguely indistinguishable, but some of the history they invoke in discussing the origin of the Jewish claim to Israel is questionable. In a typically colourful and inexact phrase, the first speaker refers to the important second wave of Jewish immigration to Israel as 'a bunch of hippies', and he states that it was the 'non-halachic' (or non-legalistic) strain of Jewish culture which gave rise to Zionism. This crucial interpretation is likely to be obscure to many because of the unexplained use of the term 'halachic', and is debatable in that a number of legalistic groups are just as stoutly Zionist in their claim to the Promised Land.

The confusions and obscurities of the central debate are the more unfortunate, since Susan Sontag elsewhere shows an effective metaphorical grasp of how communities under such pressures are sustained and reconstructed. Grief in time becomes a communal function, even a social event, as witness the contrast between those who attend a commemoration service for long-dead British soldiers at the beginning of the film, and those who weep uncontrollably by the graves of the 1973 dead at the end. A shell-shocked soldier is given sodium pentothal treatment in a military hospital so that he might relive the horror of battle and come to terms with it. And Sontag's appreciation of the harshness and futility of this rehabilitation is emphasised by her closing scenes, when we move from the doctor's simulation of the sounds of battle at his patient's bedside to lines of mock soldiers on some sort of training range to authentic tanks making their way across the disputed land—completing the cycle of recovery and readying the population for further episodes of destruction. A wail, half cantor's chant, half Muslim prayer and wholly sorrowful, accompanies the tank across country.

More accessible, and less concerned with making personal, formal connections between public events, *A Sense of Loss* also revolves round the intrusions of violence into everyday life. Having already dealt, in *The Sorrow and the Pity*, with the ways in which communities respond to situations of siege and occupation, Ophuls is here concerned with the forces which obstruct rather than facilitate accommodation. The complicated and changing situation in Ulster does not permit the same easy entry as the German occupation of France, where the events are past and the categories of collabora-

tion and resistance better understood. But despite his failure to provide the outsider with too much factual information, Ophuls' masterful film leaves one with a clear idea of the seemingly insurmountable obstacles to compromise.

Filed in December 1971 and January 1972, only months after the beginning of internment, *A Sense of Loss* focuses on the way prejudice informs fact and is transmitted through schools, songs, religion and family life. Ophuls questions patriots about the consequence of their beliefs: John McKeague, a Protestant bookshop owner whose mother was killed when his shop was burned to the ground, denies that there is any incitement to hatred in such lyrics as, 'Falls are made for burning and Taigs are made for killing,' in the song books he dispenses, and asserts that another song's reference to Catholics living in 'dirt and scruff' is a neutral statement of fact. Even when Ophuls seems most to sympathise with the interviewees, their ideology remains open to question. He asks Bernadette Devlin (who throughout the film seems to represent a kind of Mother Ireland) whether her dream of a united socialist Ireland can remain 'the light at the end of the tunnel' when so many people die in the middle and the light is still far away. She answers for all patriots in the film when she says that 'it is better to die in the middle than to suffer a constant death at the dark end.'

Ophuls is expert at plumbing the darkness by showing how the most ordinary institutions foster the conflict. Parades, funerals, pub songs all affirm a polarisation between the two communities which has profoundly affected workaday life. Gerry O'Hare, a left-wing Catholic, has become mother as well as father to his children, and indeed parent to his wife, after she was paralysed in a shooting incident. The violence of children has become almost impossible to channel, and schoolteachers vainly assign essays intended to purge the children of violent feelings. But they have already become advocates and taken to the streets with stones.

If any institution receives criticism for its role, it is the church. Ian Paisley is filmed from a low angle delivering a demonic sermon, and even the more benign socialist priest Father Desmond Wilson talks ambivalently of people living according to a 'vision'. Although Ophuls' bias between the two communities tends to show through, in that Catholics are seen more

in affirming their culture than in attacking Protestants, they are not let off altogether. A schoolmaster reveals that a former pupil, now an IRA man, was cheerful, reliable, a bit messy and apt to follow the wrong people. The teacher, a mild sort of man, is proud of his ex-pupil.

In a political ordeal which cuts across normal life, it is difficult to find a political people. But Ophuls' strongest sympathy is probably for the non-political victims: the young parents of an adopted baby accidentally killed, the family of a sixteen-year-old girl who died in a collision with a British army vehicle. In their mourning, the people without ideology seem to be even more bereft than those for whom the usual legacy of personal grief is a stronger commitment to politics. Sadly and appropriately, the film ends with paradigmatic scenes of how families perpetuate the antagonism. The mother of one IRA man, now dead, welcomes the arrival of her daughter-in-law's child, an heir to ideology, as if her son had been 'born again'.

LOUISE SWEET

Numéro Deux

If *Numéro Deux* is the most important film of Jean-Luc Godard in nearly a decade—specifically, since *2 ou 3 Choses que je sais d'elle*—one should explain at the outset what gives these films privileged places within his oeuvre. Focusing in 35mm and wide screen on a fictional working-class family, both are essentially bound up in issues of representation, and neither allies itself to any organised political faction or has any links with the Dziga-Vertov Group and/or Jean-Pierre Gorin. The point of this distinction is that Godard's pre-eminence has always stemmed directly from his grasp of the problems of representation—a line of inquiry leading from the jump-cuts of *Breathless* to the fragmented double-images of *Numéro Deux*—and that his political commitments have always been inscribed *within* this concern; it is highly debatable whether he has contributed anything of value to political thought apart from this context. Yet broadly speaking, the increasing emphasis in his work after *2 ou 3 Choses*—in *La Chinoise*, *Weekend*, *1 + 1*, *Le Gai Savoir* and all the subsequent ventures—has until now been more on the 'signified' (subject) and less on the 'signifier' (manner of representation), away from investigation and towards didacticism.

The balance, to be sure, has usually been a delicate one, and one could argue that a reverse emphasis in *2 ou 3 Choses* periodically threatens to annihilate the social subject and substitute Godard's questioning consciousness as the focal point. But here at least the meaning of Godard's narration is wholly dependent upon the accompanying images and sounds, while in works as diverse as *Weekend*, *Le Gai Savoir*, *Vent d'est* and *Tout va bien*, the central verbal discourses tend to take on a relative autonomy: to a certain extent, one can 'explain' these films simply by quoting from them.

In *Numéro Deux*, however, it is impossible to disengage the verbal elements from their contexts and retain any grasp of their assigned meanings—not only because much of the verbiage is unusually obscure, particularly in isolation from the other elements, but more centrally because the integrity of the image is challenged more basically here than before, thereby assigning the words a much more fluctuating and unstable role. Consider just a few of the strategies at work:

(1) The opening shot: on the left, a square of flickering red TV static; on the right, another square, more vertical, framing part of a man's face, later replaced by a comparable view of a woman's face. (They are the two leading characters/actors: Pierre Oudry and Sandrine Battistella.) Between the squares, and against the surrounding blackness, the words MON, TON and SON in a vertical column; opposite the latter word is IMAGE, and to the right of IMAGE, SON again—until the second SON is covered by a

Relics of war in 'Promised Lands'





Godard's double image in 'Numéro Deux': Pierre Oudry, Sandrine Battistella

widening of the right square, revealing the rest of Pierre's face, before receding again. Then IMAGE and SON flash on and off like neon signs, so that SON becomes alternately a personal pronoun ('his/her') and 'sound', depending upon which pair of words it attaches itself to. All these shifting co-ordinates help to establish an unsteady composite image whose 'meanings' are in a state of perpetual flux.

(2) Early in the film, Godard appears in his Grenoble studio—a full 35mm image—and delivers a monologue, standing on the right in profile and semi-darkness beside a TV screen which shows him more legibly head on. Shortly before the end, he reappears in the studio, sitting at a tape deck and set of sound controls on the left, while Sandrine continues an off-screen monologue; then she appears silently on a TV screen, overhead and further to the left, speaking but not in synchrony with her monologue; to the right, on the other side of Godard, her daughter Vanessa appears on another TV screen, and his gaze is diverted in her direction.

(3) More often, we are simply presented with two images at once against a black background—either adjacent TV-like squares of varying sizes or one image superimposed over another within a single square. On certain occasions, the latter technique permits an innovative use of simultaneous reverse angles, so that we see Sandrine, for instance, turned away from the camera in a long shot that is overlapped by a negative close-up of her looking towards another camera. Generally speaking, the notion of reverse-angles is central to Godard's ethical position: since Sandrine and her family primarily view the 'world outside' (us) through a TV screen—and significantly, the only time we see them all in one frame is when they're grouped around an off-screen set—the tactics of his method are to reverse this procedure.

(4) The sound-mixing is comparably disruptive, with various verbal and non-verbal tracks repeatedly overtaking, supplanting, interrupting and contesting one another; and much as the visual duplications refer back to TV, the aural separations are explicitly connected to the use of earphones by various members of the family, with songs by Léo Ferré playing an especially important role. . . . At no point do these devices become programmatic, because their functions shift at every turn, with duplications, variations and contrasts assuming fresh roles of signification in relation to the overall complex of elements.

'They say "Once upon a time,"' Sandrine remarks at one point. 'Why not "Twice upon a

time"?' Dualisms of various sorts—sound and image, documentary and fiction, male and female, 'chance' and 'necessity'—have always been essential to Godard, but here he takes the process a crucial step further. With one image and soundtrack to present or interrogate, he can attack his material like a theorem: one image of a person is an emblem, a sign, a signifier, an arbitrary block of space and time ('chance') which automatically becomes a postulate ('necessity'). But two contrary images of the same person at the same time—a procedure already familiar in Cubism—undermines the status of each as a premise. Thus with the absence of any fixed reference point or narrative guide, everything is thrown open to question, including the questions themselves, creating a perpetual passage into and out of meanings that is kept consistently interesting by Godard's wealth of invention. It is only during two extended monologues by the grandfather, when sound and image become momentarily singular, that the film threatens to grind to a halt.

I have deliberately postponed a discussion of the film's 'subject matter' in order to establish first the peculiar conditions under which this material is approached. A return to *2 ou 3 Choses* may serve as a helpful contrast: while the earlier film has a plot (however putative), a paraphrasable theme and a carefully defined trajectory and fictional time-span, the new film offers no such comforts or signposts. All the action is centred round the family flat (even the few exteriors seem to be shot from windows), and the framing is often 'intimate' to the point of ellipsis, with actors and rooms usually caught only in fragments. On the other hand, considerable stress is placed on certain factors that the former film rigorously excluded—above all, the body and its functions. Much is made of Pierre's impotence and Sandrine's constipation, and all three of the family's generations are presented in terms of their sexuality. If the overall ambience of this emphasis often seems as puritanical as the reticence of earlier Godard, the intention is nevertheless clear: to represent such subjects as the everyday matters they are, without any trappings of conventional eroticism, and to examine the points of contact between these concerns and 'political' relationships within and outside the family unit.

Thus while Sandrine remarks off-screen, 'Not a film of the left or right, but a film before and behind—before is children, behind is government,' the screen shows Vanessa's face superimposed over an image of intercourse,

Pierre entering Sandrine from behind. Clearly this can't be read as a simple joke or statement of equivalences, but several potential 'cells' of meaning interact: Pierre governs Sandrine, the government 'screws' them both, a child derives from their sex together; only later does this juxtaposition become justified in narrative terms, when we're told that Vanessa witnessed their intercourse, so that in a repeat of this shot we read the close-up as a reverse-angle. Elsewhere, the couple give a sex lesson to Vanessa and her brother Nicolas, and when Pierre compares their organs to lips and their intercourse to talking, Vanessa protests that the act is mute—recalling the metaphors of sex and language in Godard's brilliant (and neglected) short *Anticipation*, which also contested the assurances of a single integral image by situating this postulate in the realm of Utopia.

Not incidentally, it is worth noting that in many scenes, sexual and otherwise, a warmth between the characters is conveyed that has been conspicuously absent from Godard's other work over the past decade. More characteristically, the aim may be 'scientific' but the methods are generally 'poetic' and intuitive, usually reaching for the evocative metaphor rather than the precise one. In another sex scene Sandrine sits on Pierre's chest, facing away from both him and the camera while complaining about what she can't see. 'My mouth sees for you,' Pierre says, and when she asks him what he sees, he begins, 'Your body is like a river . . .'

A self-parody of the Godard method? Perhaps; and there are many such moments. But even here, the notion of one image impinging upon another (in this case, an *unseen* reverse-angle) remains essential. And puns and metaphors play an analogous role throughout. The question is raised whether Sandrine is a factory or a landscape—an electrical factory with charges and discharges, producing babies and meals, or a spectacle to look at, a part of society? When you go to a film, she declares, 'you sell out to the producer. Turn on the television' and you become an accomplice. . . . You're looking for news about yourself when what you see is news about others.'

Which is *Numéro Deux*? Sandrine delivers these words on a TV screen being watched by Godard: does that make him an accomplice? A stand-in for neither the characters nor the spectators but a mediator between these distant worlds, he occupies a distinct darkness of his own—an extension of the blackness surrounding TV screens and cinema screen alike, contiguous with both, identical to neither. All three forms of darkness suggest a womb in which meanings are spawned. 'Before I was born, I was dead,' Vanessa copies on a blackboard. 'Do all little girls have holes?' she asks her mother while taking a bath. 'Is that where memories come out?' Simultaneously destructive and constructive in its flight back to zero, *Numéro Deux* situates the loss of memory and the birth of signification on the same dark and slippery but fertile terrain—a factory-landscape where anything becomes possible.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

'Numéro Deux': 'problèmes de mélancolie . . .'



BOOK REVIEWS

A HISTORY OF THE CINEMA FROM ITS ORIGINS TO 1970

By Eric Rhode

ALLEN LANE, £10.00

The problem of constructing an historical book of this magnitude is well described by its author fairly early on. 'Hollywood in the Twenties,' writes Eric Rhode, 'severely tests the theme of this book: that some insight might be gained by relating movies, and the people who make them, to the culture of their society.' The theme in fact survives quite well for more than half the book; then the proliferation of films on a global scale leads to an almost inevitable blurring of outlines and, at the end, to a certain scrappiness as the arbitrarily chosen date of 1970 approaches. This was all probably unavoidable, and it speaks much for the author's enthusiasm and dedication that the book remains fascinating and frequently gripping.

That Eric Rhode is a knowledgeable and original critic has been realised ever since he published *Tower of Babel* in 1966; but that work did not at all indicate the range of his expertise as revealed in this one. He chooses a loose chronological scheme—Before 1920: The 1920s: The 1930s: 1940–1956: 1956–1970. But he doesn't allow himself to be tied down to it, and there are a number of illuminating and entertaining digressions, among which is a revelatory comparison between *The Grapes of Wrath* and Donskoi's Gorki Trilogy.

Rhode's account of the discovery of cinema is the best I have ever come across; it makes exceptionally magnetic reading, as does his subsequent account of the work of the early film-makers (though he does perhaps slightly underestimate Méliès). And as the book develops we find a refreshing difference from most other historical works on film. In dealing with the USSR, for instance, Rhode emphasises the importance of Futurism (with its roots with Marinetti in Italy) to the young Soviet cinema; and by contrast he pinpoints the moment when the kissing finally had to stop—the Writers' Congress of 1934, after which 'the Soviet artist, if not purged, was offered the choice of silence or of truly becoming a machine.' And he is then able, via admirable estimations of the Soviet directors—Eisenstein and Pudovkin in particular—to make a smooth transition to the French

avant-garde, with an exceptionally perceptive study of Delluc, which he later matches with an equally perceptive piece on Buñuel's *L'Âge d'Or*.

Basically the book alternates between estimates of individual directors and descriptions of the influence on film-makers and their audiences of the various movie industries of the world; and it is only towards the end, as I have already indicated, that it becomes fragmented. Indeed, after a superb bravura passage on the New Wave (especially fine on Truffaut, Godard and Chabrol) Rhode seems to have been overtaken with a certain fatigue; he is inadequate on recent U.S. cinema and not all that inspired on latterday Italian films. Latin American cinema gets short shrift, with no mention at all of *Terra im Transe* or *Antonio das Mortes*. There is no reference to Tarkovsky, let alone to some later works by more established Soviet directors like Kozintsev (*Hamlet* and *King Lear*) or Bondarchuk (*War and Peace*).

Like anyone writing on this scale, the author must be allowed his aberrations. Dreyer has little appeal to him. He ignores *Gertrud*, and of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* he astonishingly writes: 'Like Pabst, Dreyer appears to have an attachment to the subject of degraded women . . . His wish to translate this attachment into art is presumably based on a curious belief in art as something both frigid and complete that avoids most of the more attractive, if confused, aspects of human experience.' So much for Falconetti.

Rhode is also somewhat lukewarm over René Clair—mentioning neither his American films nor those of his more recent maturity such as *La Beauté du Diable*, *Belles de Nuit* and *Les Grandes Manœuvres*. The same goes for Lubitsch (*The Man I Killed* is ignored); W. C. Fields and Laurel and Hardy; Orson Welles to a degree; and Balcon's Ealing comedies (no reference whatever to Alexander Mackendrick). Nor does Rhode think much of Cavalcanti; at one point he launches an intemperate and inaccurate attack on *Coalface* which left me wondering whether he wasn't writing about some other film.

But much can be forgiven him for a truly splendid appreciation of Jean Vigo, to say nothing of almost equally splendid pieces on Carl Mayer, Buster Keaton, Jean Renoir (especially *La Règle du Jeu*), Elia Kazan, Satyajit Ray

and Nagisa Oshima (whom Rhode surely understands better than any other critic). He is incidentally excellent on Japanese cinema as a whole, and perhaps some of the distinctive flavour of this compulsive book can be indicated by the end of his commentary on *Seven Samurai*: 'Yet their violence is ferocious, and Kurosawa can barely contain it within the Pandora's box of simplistic morality. It issues forth in splendid set pieces, such as the final battle scene with its swirl of horses' rumps and falling bodies in a greyness of blinding rain and mud. He films death in slow motion: a device that Sam Peckinpah has often imitated, most notably in *The Wild Bunch*. But while Peckinpah tries to exorcise the inevitable by viewing violent death as an aesthetic experience, Kurosawa sees it as a different kind of mystery, as part of an archaic world touched by sacred forces, where the thump of a mill-wheel measures out an old man's prophecies and dust-winds howl about the graves of heroes.'

There are one or two errors in *A History of the Cinema*. Grierson's definition of documentary is misquoted; it should be 'the creative treatment (not use) of actuality.' Also it is not true that Walter Creighton was assistant to Grierson on *Drifters*; on the contrary, he was simultaneously making a rival EMB feature film on a Kipling theme called *One Family*, a grandiose affair in which a little boy dreamed that personified Dominions and Colonies of the Raj brought to Buckingham Palace the ingredients for the King's Christmas pudding. It flopped. There are a few misprints: Gaston Madot for Modot, Ernest Torrance for Torrence, Kaltenhorn for Kaltenborn, *Meshe* in the *Afternoon* for *Meshe* of the *Afternoon*.

Finally, the book is lavishly and excellently illustrated, avoiding the all too familiar cliché stills which usually bedevil histories of the cinema; this adds much to the value of a work which, whatever its faults, will be indispensable reading for all students and lovers of the medium.

BASIL WRIGHT

SIXGUNS AND SOCIETY

By Will Wright

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, £6.50

Drawing upon his years of churning out cowboy novels and films, the late Frank Gruber once assured us that there were only seven basic Western plots. Armed with the structural apparatus of Claude Lévi-Strauss, the critical techniques of Kenneth Burke, and the method of narrative analysis developed by the folklorist Vladimir Propp, Will Wright reduces this number to two, with a pair of linking variations. His publishers call his book 'the most penetrating structuralist analysis of films yet carried out in English, or perhaps in any other language.'

Professor Wright himself tells us that 'there have been no serious, systematic studies of the Western as a cultural genre, a popular set of stories, an American myth. So I have undertaken one.'

He begins his 'scientific' treatise by selecting as the basis for his study the 64 Westerns that figure in the *Motion Picture Herald's* top-grossing charts (films that made over four million dollars) between 1930 and 1972; a debatable choice, but one that relates to his view of the genre's social role. Nearly half of these pictures fall into his first category, the Classical Plot, which he breaks down into sixteen narrative functions. This is the traditional Western in which an independent hero preserves society against its predators. The form is said to have lasted from 1930 until the late Fifties and is exemplified by *Dodge City* and *Shane*. Also included here is King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun*, and one admires the dexterity with which the author works this into his scheme, though one remains unconvinced by his argument. (A film like *Duel in the Sun*, which in a debased fashion is consciously reworking scenes and themes from *The Brothers Karamazov*, also brings into question the idea of approaching the Western as if it constituted a consistent body of mythology rather than being a great catch-all arena.)

The second category Wright calls the Vengeance Variation, which first crops up with *Stagecoach* and runs concurrently with the Classical Plot in such films as *Red River*, *The Man from Laramie* and *One-Eyed Jacks* up into the 1960s. In the Vengeance Variation the hero temporarily relinquishes society in order to pursue a personal vendetta against villains whom his fellow citizens are incapable of dealing with. The third type is the Transitional Theme, which emerges and disappears in the 1950s after scoring only three times in the top-grossing charts with *Broken Arrow*, *High Noon* and *Johnny Guitar*. Here the hero moves further away from society and comes to identify the community with the corruption he opposes.

Wright's final category, towards which the Vengeance Variation and the Transitional Theme have been taking the Classical Western, is the Professional Plot. This first made the *Herald* listings with *Rio Bravo* in 1959 and rang the bell again some eighteen times in the next dozen years with *The Wild Bunch*, *Butch Cassidy*, etc. This plot has twelve narrative functions, but basically the films subsumed under it are about groups of professionals rather than a single hero, standing outside society and—honestly or dishonestly—working for money.

Just as he has difficulty in accommodating pictures centred on Indians to his scheme, so too he experiences certain problems in dealing with cavalry movies, which appear to be about groups of professionals, and he leaves out *Fort*

Apache (1948) and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), while admitting they perhaps anticipated his fourth section.

Having established these categories by structural analysis, Wright proceeds to relate the development of the Western over the past forty-odd years to America's transition from a market economy to a managed economy. In the Classical Plot the hero is seen achieving a delicate balance between his personal self-seeking and his communal obligations within a *laissez-faire* system. The Vengeance Variation and Transitional Theme suggest the increasing difficulty in sustaining this posture. Finally, the Professional Plot reflects the late capitalist world of America, a society managed by big corporations where the organisation man and the team have replaced the independent entrepreneur. Now a man realises himself not through his individual drive and his responsibility to a larger community but through his identification with an élite group.

On most matters Wright hedges his bets and qualifies his arguments with considerable subtlety, anticipating—though not always adequately answering—the reader's objections. But on one point he speaks categorically, and that is on the direct relationship of the Western to individual adjustment. 'The Western,' he says, 'has presented a series of models of relevant social action in the context of economic institutions.' Or to put it another way: 'My argument is that within each period the structure of the myth corresponds to the conceptual needs of social and self understanding required by the dominant social institutions of that period: the historical changes in the structure of the myth correspond to the changes in the structure of those dominant institutions.'

Expressed with elegance and a lightness of touch, Wright's thesis could have formed the basis for a suggestive, entertaining and perhaps influential article that might have taken its place alongside such classic essays on the Western as those by André Bazin, Robert Warshow, Harry Schein and Horace Gregory. Unfortunately the book is heavy going, and for all its battery of professional jargon and academic apparatus, ultimately over-simplified both in its view of the Western and of the society from which it springs.

Only the most dedicated Western fans and students of structuralism are likely to follow Wright through to the end, and see whether they agree with the claim in the 'Methodological Epilogue' that 'people who read this book will see Westerns in a new way. In that sense I have re-created the Western.' And this is a pity, for unquestionably his central ideas are interesting, and he provides some useful insights into aspects of storytelling, mythology, as well as of the Western itself. For example, of the Profes-

sional Plot he observes: 'In this narrative structure, the values of the heroes are derived from their fight, a remarkable change from the other Westerns where the hero's fight was a consequence of his values.'

PHILIP FRENCH

WOODY ALLEN AND HIS COMEDY

By Eric Lax
ELM TREE BOOKS, £3.75

TEX AVERY: KING OF CARTOONS

By Joe Adamson
POPULAR LIBRARY, NEW YORK, \$3.95

Those who write serious books on comics and comedy are treading on dangerous ground, for no one likes having jokes explained to him, whatever the circumstances and however educative the results. Robert Benchley frequently let loose tirades against earnest critics who 'can't believe that anything could be funny just on its own hook'; prompted in 1936 by Max Eastman's mammoth and unenjoyable *Enjoyment of Humor*, he drew up his own list of humour's rules and regulations—laughter, for instance, was 'a compensatory reflex to take the place of sneezing,' and all jokes, he decided, should begin with the letter W.

Eric Lax may have given his book on Woody Allen a slightly academic title, yet he is very much aware of the hazards. 'The greatest killer of comedy is dissection,' he says at one point, and throughout he pushes his own opinions well into the background. When he does intrude, it is with the chit-chat of a star-struck reporter, breathlessly noting his subject's clothing and eating habits or wavering income. There are exceptions; after three pages of sample jokes on death, Lax observes, 'One reason the death jokes appear is that he is preoccupied with death'—a line which could have come straight from a Benchley essay or, indeed, one of Woody Allen's. Yet the bulk of the book is in Allen's own words, caught by Lax's cassette recorder over three years (but mostly during the filming of *Sleeper* in 1973), neatly transcribed and edited.

Allen himself shies away from elaborate exegesis almost as much as Lax; instead, he offers masses of valuable information about the practicalities of his craft. We hear about his painful development from TV comedy writer to stand-up comedian, and the fiasco of *What's New Pussycat?* (Charles K. Feldman, the producer, told him, 'Write something where we can all go to Paris and chase girls.') Now that he is fully established, shaping his films to his own liking, there are other problems: choosing suitable locations, avoiding pictorially beautiful shots ('the good-looking stuff is the stuff without laughs in it'), the unfruitful and time-consuming periods of improvisation. One casualty from *Everything You Always Wanted to Know*

GODARD AND OTHERS

by Louis D Gianetti

A detailed and perceptive analysis of a much neglected aspect of film criticism—film form, with special attention paid to Godard's *Masculin-Féminin*, Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Bergman's *Persona* and Penn's *Alice's Restaurant*. The author explores how film artists employ certain structural and textual devices to convey symbolic ideas—how, in fact, form becomes content. Included are chapters on the mobile camera, the relationship between film and literature and plotlessness in the cinema.

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by Tom Costner

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About Sex is retrieved and quoted—an episode with Woody as a paltry spider (with glasses) called Sheldon Wexler, who falls for the charms of a black widow spider ('You'll have to forgive me,' he says as he clammers deep into her web, 'I'm a little tired from my mating dance'). One emerges from the book admiring Allen's tenacity almost as much as his crazy sense of humour.

With Joe Adamson's book on the cartoon director Tex Avery, the author intrudes to a larger degree—two-thirds of the space being devoted to his own commentary, and one third to an Avery interview (with little bits thrown in from story-men Heck Allen and Michael Maltese). Whereas Woody Allen is a known quantity, Avery remains a mystery to all but a growing band of enthusiasts. The name most people commit to memory from MGM cartoon credits is the name of the producer, Fred Quimby—a man, Adamson reveals, so devoid of a funnybone that he would ask 'Why does he do this?' when shown a cartoon story-board. Adamson, however, is enjoyably unequivocal about where the true

credit lies. 'No artist,' he says, 'in any century, on any continent, in any medium, has ever succeeded in creating his own universe as thoroughly and overwhelmingly as Tex Avery.'

The book does a fair job of recapturing that joyously and preposterously violent universe through Adamson's high-spirited words and many frame enlargements. The fuzziness of the latter proves to be the book's major drawback; without the original gaudy colours, it is sometimes difficult to separate the character from its background. Reading the descriptions, one realises how difficult it is to keep verbal track of a cartoon gag—particularly one of Avery's, when characters and bodies are subject to so much distortion ('the wolf is once split in half horizontally by colliding with a French door, and once transformed into a swinging door dissected vertically'—a piece of business from *Little Rural Riding Hood*, 1949). But Adamson copes well with this problem and thankfully steers clear of any interpretative analysis; for him, a celebration of Avery's very existence is quite sufficient.

GEOFF BROWN



Kind Hearts and Coronets

SIR,—I now have time to read some of the many books on films and film production and am concerned at the many gross inaccuracies which appear in relation to films for which I was responsible.

A typical example has just come to my notice. The book in question is *Masterworks of the British Cinema*, published by Lorrimer in 1974, with an introduction by John Russell Taylor. It consists of full-length screenplays of *Brief Encounter*, *The Third Man*, *Kind Hearts and Coronets* and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*.

On page 8 Taylor writes: '... among Michael Balcon's young men at Ealing, it is Robert Hamer [who stands out], sophisticate among the whimsical fantasticks, fastidious stylist among the rosy realists, acid intelligence among mild-mannered devotees of the quaint. Hamer, of course, was a writer as well as a director, and moreover made his most famous film, *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, dangerously far afield from the cosy communal criticism sessions of Ealing mornings, among the alien corn of Pinewood.'

Taylor's comments are of rela-

tive unimportance to me, but accuracy is of paramount importance to students, researchers and others. Not one single foot of *Kind Hearts and Coronets* was shot at Pinewood and, with the exception of exterior scenes at Leeds Castle, Kent and other locations, the film was made entirely at Ealing: production commencing September 1st, 1948.

I believe John Russell Taylor lectures on Cinema at an important American university. It is hoped, for the sake of the students, that he does his homework carefully.

Yours faithfully,

MICHAEL BALCON

Hartfield, Sussex.

Touch of Evil

SIR,—Jonathan Rosenbaum's notes on the longer version of *Touch of Evil* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1975) are, like his earlier research into Orson Welles' abortive *Heart of Darkness* project, a valuable contribution to Welles scholarship. However, Rosenbaum makes some erroneous assumptions about *Touch of Evil* (for which I may be partly to blame, since I made the same assumptions in a *Variety* article last June), and they must be corrected before a definitive study of the film and its authorship can be undertaken.

Rosenbaum says that the longer version is 'apparently identical to Welles' final cut except for the credits, which still appear over the opening shot instead of the last.' After seeing the longer version, and examining a lengthy memorandum which Welles wrote to Universal-International executives after he first saw it (during post-production), I have concluded that the longer version is simply that—

Don Siegel: American Cinema by Alan Lovell

A larger and revised version of the original 1968 booklet, intended as a working document produced in a particular critical/cultural situation and attempting to articulate issues arising from Siegel's work. *Price 55p (63p inc. postage)*

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A study of 'variety' on TV, from the circus to Cilla, from the Black and White Minstrels to Christmas Night with the Stars. The author describes the visual styles and procedures of a wide selection of shows, linking them with the ideals of energy, abundance and community they try to express. *Price 35p (43p inc. postage)*

Television Monograph No. 3 Television and the February 1974 General Election

by Trevor Pateman

This monograph attempts to analyse the use of television during the election as a medium independent of the parties and as a vehicle for them, and should be of interest to teachers of both film/TV and politics etc. *Price 55p (63p inc. postage)*

Television Monograph No. 4 Football on Television

edited by Edward Buscombe

There are five contributors to this study, which concentrates on football, and centres round the crucial problem of mediation and examines the extent to which sports programmes can really be seen as a 'record' of events. *Price 55p (63p inc. postage)*

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An account of the entire production cycle of a recent British horror film, *Legend of The Werewolf*, from scripting and set design through shooting to publicity and distribution. With many illustrations. *Price 95p (£1.11p inc. postage)*

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longer without being Welles' cut. Only the rough cut was assembled by Welles, and I do not know if that still exists. Universal 16, which is handling 16mm distribution of the longer version in the U.S., claims only that it is 'nearer to Orson Welles' original conception' than the shorter version; which, in the spirit of responsible scholarship, it continues to distribute.

From the Welles memo, it is clear that he was distressed over much of Harry Keller's work in restructuring the rough cut and virtually all of the scenes which Keller shot and added to the film (the Keller scenes, in fact, occupy even more running time in the longer version than in the shorter). Though Welles conceded that some of Keller's work was beneficial to the film, he found that the longer version confused and diluted some points of dramatic emphasis in the rough cut. He also criticised, in retrospect, some of his own footage (and soundtrack—much of the memo deals meticulously with sound), urging studio executives to let him do another cut of the film, a request which was not granted.

Harry Keller, when I spoke to him recently, admits that after so many years' distance from the project, even he is unclear about details.

Though the availability of the longer version is certainly a boon to scholarship—it contains some fascinating material which en-

larges our perception of the characters, particularly Vargas and Menzies—it is unfortunately also true that we now have an even more complicated problem of authorship on our hands. In some respects, indeed, the shorter version is a more effective piece of storytelling; the longer version, while it resolves some obscure points in the plot, also tends to be repetitive and digressive, as well as containing some glaringly weak Keller footage (particularly the kissing scene in the car). One hopes that Welles will help set the record straight, perhaps in Peter Bogdanovich's long-awaited interview book.

Yours faithfully,

JOSEPH MCBRIDE

Beverly Hills, California.

From Red Sea to Blue Nile

SIR,—We are endeavouring to trace a film of unusual historical interest: Rosita Forbes' *From Red Sea to Blue Nile*, taken in Ethiopia in 1924 by Harold Jones, and distributed in the 1930s by Ensign Ltd.

We should indeed be grateful if any reader could inform us of the whereabouts of this film, which with the passing of time has acquired remarkable historical interest.

Yours faithfully,

R. PANKHURST

Institute of Ethiopian Studies,
Addis Ababa University
Ethiopia.

Edinburgh Encounters

SIR,—May I correct a couple of howlers which appeared in my 'Edinburgh Encounters' in the last issue of SIGHT AND SOUND?

Apart from inadvertently substituting Webern's first name for Schoenberg's, and thereby assigning an erroneous title to Straub and Huillet's *Introduction to the Accompaniment to a Cinematographic Scene* by Arnold Schoenberg, I incorrectly surmised in a footnote that Chantal Akerman edited a half-hour out of *Jeanne Dielman*, 23 *Quai de Commerce*—1080 *Bruxelles* between its screenings at Cannes and Edinburgh. At a subsequent meeting with Chantal Akerman, I discovered that this false impression grew out of her own original miscalculation of the film's running time, and that in

fact no cuts at all have been made in the film since its completion...

As an additional footnote, it may be of some interest that Akerman's interpretation of the film's narrative is psychological—with Jeanne Dielman discovering pleasure for the first time off-screen with the second of her male customers (Jacques Doniol-Valcroze), which leads to the later breakdown of her routine and the murder in the film's penultimate shot. Although I personally find this reading less interesting than the ambiguities concerning motivations that I experienced while watching the film, and all the implications that these engender, it seems worth reporting as part of the record.

Yours faithfully,

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

London, S.W.10

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

JOHN BELTON has recently completed a book on the films of Robert Mitchum... JOHN CHITTOCK writes on film and video in the *Financial Times* and publishes the international news letter *Screen Digest*; he is chairman of the British Federation of Film Societies and active in other national film and television organisations... JAN DAWSON is currently visiting Australia as special consultant to the Australian Film Institute... PATRICIA ERENS is co-editor of the *Film Reader* and has published articles in *Film Comment*, *The Velvet Light Trap*, etc... BERT HOGENKAMP studies history at the University of Amsterdam and is one of the editors of *Skrien*; he is working on a Dutch translation of a selection of Eisenstein's writings... HERBERT

HOLBA is founder and leader of the Viennese 'Action' group; a leading Austrian film historian, critic, collector and self-styled 'factophile'... STEVEN KRAMER teaches history at Goucher College, Baltimore... GUY PHELPS is the author of *Film Censorship*, published last year by Gollancz, and assistant director of the Tyneside Film Theatre... LOUISE SWEET studied government at the universities of Chicago and Berkeley and is about to undertake a project on the social effects of the '73 war in Israel... JAMES WELSH teaches English and film at Salisbury State College, Maryland; he and Steven Kramer have written articles on Gance for *Film Comment* and *Cinema Journal*... VIRGINIA WRIGHT WEXMAN teaches literature and film at the University of Illinois and is working on a book on Robert Altman.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CIC for *Hustle*, *Uzana's Raid*, *The Mean Machine*.
COLUMBIA-WARNER for Barry Lyndon, *The Man Who Would be King*.
FOX-RANK for *Conversation Piece*, *The War Lord*.
UNITED ARTISTS for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Killer Elite*, *Deception*.
HEMDALE INTERNATIONAL for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.
THE OTHER CINEMA for *Promised Lands*, *Numéro Deux*.
PLEASANT PASTURES for *Some Call It Loving*.
R-K-O for *Sylvia Scarlett*.
M-G-M for *The Legend of Lylah Clare*.
MCELROY PRODUCTIONS for *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.
FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT/LES FILMS DU CARROSSE for *L'Argent de Poche*.
BERNARD PRIM/MARIANNE PRODUCTIONS for *The Tenant*.
RUSCONI FILM for *Anno Uno*.
PONTI-DE LAURENTIIS for *Dov'è la Libertà?*
ORIZZONTE 2000 for *The Messiah*.
MOSFILM for *The Mirror*.
PHILIPS ELECTRICAL for VCR and VLP disc equipment.
BBC-TV for CEEFAX page.
HERBERT HOLBA/PETER SPIEGEL/STAATLICHES FILM ARCHIV DER DDR for *Schleppzug M.17*, *Brüder*,

Razzia in St. Pauli, *Morgen beginnt das Leben*, *Ein Mädchen geht an Land*, *Zwei Welten*, *Drei Unteroffiziere*.
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Future Playback

from page 117

interested in the video disc when player-population passes the one million mark.

The prospect of feature films interspersed with commercials is an unlikely one. What is more possible is a form of co-production, with, for example, oil company finance going into films like *Winning* and *Grand Prix*. If the sponsor stands a chance of recovering just the original investment, he might well be content with a credit title and no more. Far from being such a disturbing prospect, a trend like this might release more of the film industry's money for financing the more worthwhile projects, when in the past the limited funds have been siphoned off into safe blockbusters. It is impossible to guess precisely what will happen, but it would be rash to assume that there will be no repercussions.

There are other financial side effects that will be felt, and some of these are already displaying early symptoms. The 16mm non-theatrical market, for example, a large slice of which is represented by 700 film societies in Britain, is dependent on distributors making some investment in 16mm copies—an expensive process when a feature has been shot on 35mm film. The decision to provide 16mm copies of a feature is clearly determined by the size of the 16mm market, and until now this has been considerably supported by the world merchant fleets. For some 16mm distributors, ships represent an important outlet. However, some merchant fleets are beginning to

install videotape cassette equipment, offering to crews and passengers a shipboard TV service, frequently with programmes flown out soon after their UK transmission (e.g. Cup Finals). This is becoming a growing commercial operation, and as it spreads it must depress the maritime demand for 16mm films. With the 16mm market already a finely balanced commercial equation, the day is approaching when supplies of new feature films on the gauge will dry up.

For film societies this has serious implications, and it may help to hasten a massive switch to video viewing for all forms of non-theatrical viewers. If this starts to happen, the repercussions will travel further back along the line, affecting the future sales of 16mm projectors. A chain reaction could then begin, with the declining market for 16mm films further depressed as the availability of projectors is affected.

Much of this prediction is based on nothing more than reasoned speculation, conditioned by some inescapable facts. Market research in these new branches of motion pictures is often unreliable if not downright irresponsible. No one can predict with scientific precision just how viewing statistics will shift from the cinema or television to other systems. Nevertheless, a considerable commercial investment is now being poured into some of these systems—especially video-cassettes, video discs and even television projectors. When big business moves in unison, one feels that they can't all be wrong. The names already read like an industrial Who's Who: Sony, Philips, Telefunken, Thomson-CSF, MCA,

RCA, Decca, Mitsubishi, Eastman Kodak, Thorn, Grundig, National Panasonic, Plessey—to name a few with current projects. On the programming side, the list is equally impressive, ranging from Time Life to Universal Pictures (via MCA), and from W. H. Smith to Axel Springer. The emphasis on publishers rather than film producers is not accidental; that is the way the trend is emerging.

Nevertheless, in the British film industry, awareness and concern is not difficult to find. Most of the trade bodies—distributors, exhibitors, the trade unions—have started to assume stances, ready for yet a further attack on the cinema. Curiously, the broadcasters remain aloof and complacent, knowing a little about the challenge but not really believing it will happen. In some quarters, there is a belief that these new media could break the impasse that has existed between the cinema industry and television. Those in the business know that, until now, Wardour Street has tended to be a totally different world from television; even the people are different, temperamentally, culturally and socially. But video promises to be a common denominator, forcing some kind of union between the cinema and television.

If the future is sensibly handled, with discussion and co-operation between all parties, organisations and sectors of interest, the film industry might find at last that far from being a declining industry, killed by television, it is merely part of one huge growth industry in which broadcasting is only another interdependent element. ■



AN INTRODUCTION

JOHN FELL

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Film Guide

ADVENTURE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES' SMARTER BROTHER, THE (Fox-Rank)
Gene Wilder's wild and woolly fling at writing, directing and performing offers a few stray chuckles but little more: the cast rely too heavily on facial tics (notably Marty Feldman and Leo McKern), and many jokes arrive stillborn. (Madeline Kahn, Dom DeLuise.)

****ANKUR—THE SEEDLING** (Contemporary)
Very well made Indian rural drama, criticising the caste system and the hypocrisies of the ruling class, which nearly always avoids the obvious melodramatic traps. Fine colour and location work, a distinctive feature debut by Shyam Benegal and a delicately felt performance from Shabana Azmi as the servant girl with two masters. (Anant Nag.) Reviewed.

****BARRY LYNDON** (Columbia-Warner)
With an impersonal omniscient narration operating as crucially as in *The Killing*, and a surface of wonder and poignance as visually ravishing as *2001*, Kubrick focuses on the 18th century through the lenses of the 19th, twists Thackeray's novel into a different shape entirely, and forges his most ambiguous and melancholy spectacle to date. A personal blockbuster of indelible intransigence. (Ryan O'Neal, Marisa Berenson, Leon Vitali.) Reviewed.

BREAKHEART PASS (United Artists)
A turgid mélange of *Murder on the Orient Express* and Charles Bronson derring-do, none too plausibly set down in the Wild West. Working even harder than Bronson, writer Alistair MacLean turns up a new character or plot twist with practically every line of dialogue, and all dramatic logic is lost in the population explosion. (Jill Ireland, Ben Johnson, Richard Crenna; director, Tom Gries.)

***BUTLEY** (Seven Keys)
A very fair record by Harold Pinter of his own stage production. Although Simon Gray's play seems inordinately derivative (lecturer's verbal assault on education establishment, by *Lucky Jim* out of *Look Back in Anger*), it is literate, well acted and undeniably funny. (Alan Bates, Richard O'Callaghan, Jessica Tandy.)

****CONVERSATION PIECE** (Fox-Rank)
Burt Lancaster takes on some of the characteristics of the (then) ailing Visconti in a *kammerspiel* which looks better than it sounds. The quieter, introspective moments with Lancaster caring for a wounded Helmut Berger and roaming around a beautiful studio set work better than the overwrought, ill-written and dubbed sallies into politics and the generation gap. (Silvana Mangano, Claudia Marsani.) Reviewed.

***DEATH RACE 2000** (Focus)
A fast-moving offshoot of *Rollerball*, much more entertaining than its predecessor, mainly motored by a gallery of grotesque characters and a high-spirited enjoyment of its own absurdities, rendered in a

black comedy comic-strip form. (David Carradine, Sylvester Stallone; director, Paul Bartel.)

****ELEKTREIA** (Academy/Connoisseur)
Jancsó's reworking of Greek drama, in which Electra expresses the spirit of revolution, and is borne aloft by Orestes in a scarlet helicopter. Dazzling choreography on the Hungarian plain, as the director further refines his approaches to myth, ideology and the long take. (Mari Töröcsik, József Madarász.)

****GALILEO** (Seven Keys)
Basically sound, despite Topol's lightweight performance, Losey's long-awaited adaptation of Brecht's play is flawed by a curious hesitancy in confronting its theatricality (the captions and chanted commentaries are particularly clumsy). (Michel Lonsdale, Edward Fox, John McEnery.)

****HOMECOMING, THE** (Seven Keys)
Successful transfer rather than adaptation to the screen of Peter Hall's brilliant staging of a major Pinter play, with Cyril Cusack and Michael Jayston replacing John Normington and Michael Bryant in the original production. A caustic ode to family love, with unexpected twists that convert the dialogue's hard edges into the tender caresses of a waking dream. (Ian Holm, Paul Rogers, Vivien Merchant.)

****HUSTLE** (CIC)
Bleak and brassy Robert Aldrich thriller about a Los Angeles cop, intent on seeing himself as a tarnished latterday hero in the Bogart mould, but gradually sucked deeper into masochistic despair. While the script seems intent on sentimentalising the hero's psychosis out of existence, Aldrich consistently thrusts it to the fore. (Burt Reynolds, Catherine Deneuve, Ben Johnson.)

****IN CELEBRATION** (Seven Keys)
Filmed theatre at its best, or at least its most defensible: the original cast of David Storey's play is reunited with the original director, and the results are effortlessly controlled and nuanced. Alan Bates shines in the king-sized part of the malcontent son returning, with his brothers, to his working-class roots. (James Bolam, Brian Cox, Bill Owen, Constance Chapman; director, Lindsay Anderson.)

***INSERTS** (United Artists)
After rubbing shoulders with von Stroheim, a genius of the silents—Hollywood's Wonder Kid—is reduced to directing porn in the early sound days. Despite accurate movie references and a good beginning, the film eventually tumbles into sexploitation itself. (Richard Dreyfuss, Veronica Cartwright; director, John Byrum.)

****KILLER ELITE, THE** (United Artists)
Sam Peckinpah's most blatantly commercial movie since *The Getaway*, and one similarly marked by a streak of self-parody. But the melancholia of his last two films undeniably begins to eat away at the risible plot and self-conscious script, turning the whole exercise into a bizarre *jeu d'esprit*. (James Caan, Robert Duvall, Gig Young.) Reviewed.

LUCKY LADY (Fox-Rank)
A soporific waste of the talents of Stanley Donen, Burt Reynolds, Gene Hackman and Liza Minnelli, sunk beneath the tedium of a script by Willard Huyck and Gloria Katz that aims at synthesising at least half a dozen recent hits and trends—from Depression nostalgia to kinky threesomes—and sports its calculations on its sleeve like

rhinestones. (Michael Hordern, John Hillerman.)

LUTHER (Seven Keys)
Disastrous version of Osborne's play which completely muffs the historical point by plugging Luther's private torments. The obstreperously English-Irish-Welsh supporting cast tends to leave Stacy Keach's creditable performance out in the cold. (Alan Badel, Patrick Magee, Hugh Griffith; director, Guy Green.)

****MAGIC FLUTE, THE** (Gala)
A few coy moments apart, Bergman's journey into Mozart is an infectiously joyous affair which deepens (and alters) some of the characterisation and effortlessly moves from a theatrical facade into some lively filmic flights of fancy. A good, if not inspired, musical performance from Swedish singers. (Josef Köstlinger, Irma Urrila, Håkan Hagegård.)

****MAN WHO WOULD BE KING, THE** (Columbia-Warner)
Huston's long-planned adaptation of Kipling's story turns out to be a wry and at times slightly weary blockbuster. But a script which rescues with the over-reaching ambition of its two principals, and echoes of the mysterious order of Masons, keeps it alive and rippling with wit. Excellent performances by Sean Connery and Michael Caine. (Christopher Plummer, Saeed Jaffrey.) Reviewed.

***ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST** (United Artists)
Ken Kesey's description of the hallucinating, angst-ridden counter-culture of the early Sixties has been turned into a much more neatly therapeutic experience. In a superb performance, only limited by the schematic contours of his role, Jack Nicholson spreads some liberating havoc in an up-tight mental institution, until the System strikes back. (Louise Fletcher, William Redfield, Will Sampson; director, Milos Forman.) Reviewed.

***RANCHO DELUXE** (United Artists)
Curious, prankish mélange of camp Western and social commentary, involving a pair of drop-out rustlers who use a buffalo gun and a chainsaw. Bumptiously cynical about the commercial trappings of the new Montana (Navajo blankets on the ranch house tiles), but the throwaway lines fly off in too many uncertain directions. (Jeff Bridges, Sam Waterston, Elizabeth Ashley; director, Frank Perry.)

****RENDEZVOUS AT BRAY** (Essential Cinema)
Belgian director André Delvaux's third feature gracefully adapts an elliptical Gothic-surrealist tale by Julien Gracq into a lyrical charade about commitment, memory and desire. Set in 1917, with precise performances and settings creating an ambience of decanted eroticism. (Anna Karina, Mathieu Carrière, Bulle Ogier.)

****SANSHO DAYU** (Cinegate)
Kenji Mizoguchi at the height of his storytelling powers in a tale of a family's struggles through slavery, prostitution and political upheavals in 11th century Japan. Awesome in conception as well as execution, with an equally firm grasp of history and fantasy transformed by a master of *mise en scène* into what Rivette has called 'an art of modulation'. (Yoshiaki Hanayaki, Kinuyo Tanaka.)

****SCOUNDREL IN WHITE** (Fox-Rank)
Chabrol's strikingly weird Dr. Popaul, about a handsome doctor (Jean-Paul Belmondo) who pursues ugly women for the beauty of their souls. Its mercurial moods and looking-glass morality (adding up to a sort of comic-strip

version of *Landru*) are not always easy to assess in this horribly dubbed version. (Mia Farrow, Daniel Ivernel.)

****SHIVERS** (Target)
David Cronenberg's witty variation on the *Towering Inferno* formula of the disaster-struck apartment house dwellers who find their luxury environment absurdly difficult to escape. An exploitation horror movie which delivers its quota of special effects shocks while exploring the perverse parasitic-science of Cronenberg's more experimental SF features. (Paul Hampton, Joe Silver, Lynn Lowry.)

STEPPENWOLF (Contemporary)
Psychedelic version of Herman Hesse's solemn philosophical tract, which compresses and confuses the philosophy, pumps up the love interest, and makes of the title character's trip through the Magic Theatre a spiritual pilgrimage far less rewarding than the excursions of the Yellow Submarine. (Max von Sydow, Dominique Sanda, Pierre Clément.)

****STORY OF SIN, THE** (Pleasant Pastures)
Borowczyk's remarkable adaptation of a (somewhat infamous) classic novel by Stefan Zeromski. The story of a girl's progress from virginity to degradation, seen simultaneously as a celebration of *l'amour fou* and as an analysis of the mechanisms of period erotic melodrama. (Grazyna Dlugolecka, Jerzy Zelnik.)

***SUNSHINE BOYS, THE** (CIC)
Neat adaptation of Neil Simon's play about two elderly feuding vaudevillians reunited for a TV special. Generally pleasing, but George Burns (marvellously deadpan) and Walter Matthau (frenziedly theatrical) feud with ill-matched resources, and the movie's visual delights vanish with the title sequence. (Richard Benjamin; director, Herbert Ross.)

****WELFARE** (The Other Cinema)
Frederick Wiseman's latest foray into the workings of an American institution devotes 167 minutes to a New York welfare centre. Amid all the frustrations of applicants and clerks trying to come to grips with a bureaucratic nightmare, a radical critique takes shape—all the more disturbing because ultimate causes and effects are kept off-screen.

****WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY?** (Focus)
Redubbing a Japanese thriller redolent of James Bond and Pearl White, Woody Allen and a team of collaborators fashion a frantic counterpoint of sound and image as deliciously silly as a Tex Avery cartoon. Inexplicably arriving here ten years late, this inspired screwball one-off remains as fresh as the day it was born.

***WHITE DAWN, THE** (CIC)
Three shipwrecked American whalers are rescued by Eskimos who have never seen a white man before. Predictably, the clash of cultures results in tragedy, but the atmosphere is convincing (locations in Baffin Land) and the glimpses of Eskimo mythology fascinating. (Warren Oates, Timothy Bottoms, Lou Gossett; director, Philip Kaufman.)

***WOMAN UNDER THE INFLUENCE, A** (Jo Lustig)
John Cassavetes' latest assault on the inarticulate charts the breakdown of a working-class housewife (Gena Rowlands) and her efforts to reintegrate herself into her family. As usual with Cassavetes, intuition triumphs over analysis and tremors are recorded like epiphanies, but there is enough ambivalence in plot and performances to justify much of the heavy breathing. (Peter Falk, Cristina Grisanti.)

An open letter to Dino De Laurentiis

CINEFANTASTIQUE Vol 5 No 1

Will our letter do any good? Not as long as there is a fastbuck to be made. Also in the same issue, David Bartholomew interviews Louis Malle about his stunning new work of fantasy titled **BLACK MOON**, and Don Shay writes a production article on an ambitious American independent science fiction film, **A BOY AND HIS DOG**, based on the award-winning novella by Harlan Ellison. International Film Guide 1975 edited by Peter Cowie labels CINEFANTASTIQUE the "successor" to the defunct French magazine Midi-Minuit Fantastique, calling us "An enthusiastic attractive quarterly with a special emphasis on science fiction films." Now in our fifth year of publication, each large-size, 48 page issue, printed on glossy coated paper, features eight pages printed in full color, profusely illustrated to provide a visual appeal unmatched among film publications. Try a no-risk trial subscription today!

Dino De Laurentiis was the first of two major Hollywood producers to embark on filming a remake of the 1933 film classic **KING KONG**. Production of his film and one at Universal Pictures is now underway, both using an actor in an ape costume. In CINEFANTASTIQUE Vol 5 No 1 Paul Mandell writes "An Open Letter To Dino De Laurentiis" to let Dino and his Universal film rivals know where they went wrong. Mandell points out first of all how dumb it is to want to remake **KING KONG**, secondly, how the filmmakers have compounded their stupidity by attempting to do so by using any method other than model animation, the technique employed by Willis O'Brien in 1933 to make the original film so unique and so remarkable.

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